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LECONTE DE LISLE

A Study on the Man and His Poetry with Original Adaptations in English Verse

New Edition

By

IRVING BROWN

Author of *Deep Song, Nights and Days on the Gypsy Trail*, and other works

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CONTENTS

Preface to the Second Edition xi

PART I

The Man 1–79
Chapter I. The Making of the Poet 1
II. The Contemporary Background.... 46
III. The Question of Craftsmanship... 67

PART II

The Poems 81–184

CHAPTER I

Poems of Love and Passion 85
Le Manchy 85
Épiphanie 88
Le Parfum impérissable 88
Thestylis 90
Kléarista 91
Cunacépa 91
Le Baiser suprême 96
Christine 98
Les Elfes 101

CHAPTER II

The Sorrows of Love 103
Les Roses d'Ispahan 105
Le Dernier souvenir 106
Pantouns malais 108
Nurmahal 112

140010

CHAPTER III

Poems of Pride and Revolt 114
Quaïn 114
La Tristesse du diable 122
Le Soir d'une bataille 123
Ultra Cœlos 124
La Ravine Saint-Gilles 126

CHAPTER IV

Poems of Combat 128
Le Corbeau 129
La Bête écarlate 132

CHAPTER V

Poems of Disillusionment 135
Dies Irae 135
L'Illusion suprême 138
Mille ans après 140
Les Hurleurs 141
La Chute des étoiles 142
Nox 143
Dans le ciel clair 144

CHAPTER VI

Poems of Experience 146
The Animal Poems 147
Les Éléphants 149
Le Sommeil du condor 150
La Panthère noire 151
Le Jaguar 153
Other Poems of Experience 154
La Vérandah 154
Médailles antiques. Etudes latines 155

CHAPTER VII

The Ideal 157
La Vision de Brahma 159
Midi 167
Le Secret de la vie 169
Soleils! Poussière d'or 170
Hypatie 171
Le Cœur de Hialmar 175
La Mort de Valmiki 176

CHAPTER VIII

Leconte de Lisle's Place in Literature 179

PART III

Selected Poems and Translations 185–261
Épiphanie 186
Epiphany 187
Thestylis 188
Thestylis 189
Les Elfes 192
The Elves 193
Dans le ciel clair 196
Across the Clear Sky 197
Les Damnés 200
The Damned 201
Le Baiser suprême 202
The Supreme Kiss 203
Pantouns malais 204
Malayan Pantouns 205
Le Sommeil du condor 218
The Condor's Sleep 219

Les Montreurs 220
Showmen 221
La Tristesse du diable 222
The Gloom of Satan 223
Le Soir d'une bataille 226
The Evening of a Battle 227
La Cœur de Hialmar 230
The Heart of Hialmar 231
Les Hurleurs 234
Night Wails 235
L'Orbe d'or 238
The Golden Orb 239
Le Dernier souvenir 240
The Last Memory 241
La Panthère noire 242
The Black Panther 243
La Vérandah 246
The Verandah 247
Vile Potabis 250
Vile Potabis 251
La Maya 252
Maya 253
Midi 254
Noontide 255
Soleils! Poussière d'or 258
Suns! Golden Grains 259

Brief Bibliography 262
Index 265

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Though the first edition of this book was not published until 1924, the original animus and some of the research and writing date back to my early student days in Paris. Its qualities and shortcomings are the result of youthful enthusiasm. As Musset wrote in his sonnet *Au Lecteur:*

> " Et j'aurais pu le corriger.
> Mais, quand l'homme change sans cesse,
> Au passé pourquoi rien changer? "

The opening paragraph is one of "those things one would rather not have said." What I meant was, that his work contains relatively few artistic blemishes, few inequalities; but perhaps I should have added that it is sometimes "faultily faultless." Moreover, all this is even truer of Heredia. Also, if I seemed to imply that the Parnassians were better poets than either the Romanticists or Symbolists, I humbly apologise.

My estimate has changed in regard to the relative value of his work as a whole and the value of some of the individual poems, such as *Quaïn, Le soir d'une bataille,* and *La bête écarlate.*

Occasionally he is mastered by his emotions instead of mastering them, and falls into both the artistic and human error he most scorned. In attacking fanaticism, he is sometimes fanatical himself.

I believe I was justified in confining myself in the main to positive criticism; and that Rodó was right in saying that a capacity for admiration is the critic's chief asset. Negative criticism is useful chiefly to living authors, for they still can mend their ways. My aim was to help American and English readers to create for themselves, from the work of a great French poet, new worlds of emotion and of spiritual fulfillment, and through his poems to live deeper and richer lives.

Though little known to the general cultivated reader in North America, Leconte de Lisle has been deeply venerated in the Spanish-speaking portion of the New World. He has been a source of inspiration to men like Rubén Darío, Leopoldo Díaz, Victor Pérez Petit, Gutiérrez Nájara, and José Enrique Rodó.

Why is it that Leconte de Lisle is admittedly a great artist, and yet is not widely read? Even French readers will tell you that he is "difficult." I do not believe it. *Bhagavat* itself is clear and simple compared to poems of Mallarmé and Paul Valéry. They say he is cold. Nonsense! I think I have demonstrated the contrary. What repels is his misanthropy. We like those who like us, even when they are the authors of our books. "Un livre, c'est un homme," Musset wrote. One reason for the latter's popularity is the fact that the man himself was extremely sympathetic. Musset is the friend of all the world.

It is perhaps this very misanthropy of Leconte de Lisle which caused him to turn to animals with such

understanding. He felt with them as perhaps no writer ever has, before or since.

The poems translated are merely ones that lent themselves to rendering in English verse. Some that I like best stubbornly resisted recasting in a new mold. No doubt it is better that they did. "Translations" is a misnomer. "Variations on a French theme" would perhaps be more accurate.

When the book was published, the method of studying the poet's imagination was an innovation. The results briefly related on pages 25–27 represent weeks of careful research. The explanation of "phrasal lengths" as the chief basis of French prosody, as outlined on pages 72–73, showed the underlying reason for the counting of syllables and observing cesuras. More stress, however, should have been placed on the part played by accent in French versification. As far as I remember, the rôle of pitch, so important in vocal and instrumental music, and an unconscious element of French poetics, is pointed out here for the first time.

The chapter on the contemporary background is somewhat out of proportion, though one phase of it deserves more emphasis: the widespread religious despair, the groping toward other religions, and the substitution of new cults, for the waning of belief in orthodox Christianity. It was a period of many gods and many atheisms, a period of positivism compensated for by many mysticisms.

The ineffectual idealism of the poet's generation is well depicted by Flaubert in his *Education sentimentale.*

Leconte de Lisle was more a product of his literary environment than I may have indicated. He lacked great originality. Much might be added as to the influence he received, not only from writers who are more or less of the same type, such as Hugo, Gautier, and de Vigny, but also from some who are seemingly very different, such as Lamartine, with *Les harmonies* and *La chute d'un ange,* and George Sand, whose novel *Indiana* helped reveal the beauties of his native island to the young creole.

There is still something to be said in regard to the childhood of the poet, which would doubtless explain much of his fundamental melancholy and misanthropy. There are still many documents to be unearthed.

After my book was written there appeared the excellent study of Leconte de Lisle and his poetry by Edmond Estève. Though relatively complete, its author points out that it is still too early to write a definitive book on the leader of the Parnassians.

I. B.

New York, 1929.

PART I

THE MAN

CHAPTER I

THE MAKING OF THE POET

Leconte de Lisle is the most perfect poet that France has thus far produced. One is tempted to say that he is the most perfect poet that any land has brought forth in the nineteenth century. He came at a time when the lyric outburst of Romanticism had reached its culmination. From this day on, the curve is a descending one. He represents the period of maturity, the period preceding that of decay.

He was the leader of the Parnassians. This group had only one thing in common, their love of plastic beauty, harmonious form. Gautier, the principal forerunner, and Heredia, the chief disciple, lacked the high seriousness, and the emotional and spiritual depth which are necessary for really great poets. They were not representative men in the Emersonian sense.

The very perfection of Leconte de Lisle has kept him from being appreciated at his true worth. He made no concessions to the taste of the mob as did Hugo, no attempt to please the pit as did Shakspere himself. It is the defects of a poet which are most easily imitated, and which establish schools of poetry, for example Petrarchism and Gongorism. Such defects he lacked. There are no cracks and crevices in which the destructive critics could set their teeth. Therefore they passed his poetry by with the remark that it is as cold and dispas-

sionate as a statue. The falsity of this view has long been evident. The comparison however is apt. His verse is as imperishable as marble, and like the Winged Victory it is charged with feeling, and vibrant with eternal life.

Among the peaks of the Alps, one of the most extraordinary is the Weisshorn. It is less massive than Mont Blanc, and less striking than the Matterhorn, but more difficult to scale, and more beautiful than either. The tourists that flock in bands to Switzerland every summer seldom see it, for it is hidden by lesser mountains. To know it one must leave the crowds, and with a guide penetrate the heights. The view from its lofty summit repays a thousandfold the dizzy climb. And the sight of its pure pyramidal form rising in lone grandeur is unforgetable. Such is Leconte de Lisle among the poets.

It is always possible to enjoy a work of art without knowing the maker; and Leconte de Lisle was the last person to wish to intrude his personality upon the world. Still it is always instructive to watch the development of the creative imagination in a man of genius; and it is always inspiring to know something of a poet whose contemporaries looked up to as the leader, a man of noble character, who followed his ideal of beauty unswervingly.

Leconte de Lisle was born in 1818 on a tropical island in the Indian ocean, *l'Île Bourbon,* or as it was rebaptized by the French Revolutionary government, *l'Île de la Réunion.* Here is a brief genealogy of Leconte de Lisle, in his own words:

"The Marquis de Lanux, of Gascon origin, having shared in a conspiracy against the Regent, takes refuge

in Holland and later comes to Bourbon in 1720. He marries there, and has a son and a daughter. The latter, Genevieve de Lanux, is wedded to Paul de Parny, and has a son, Evariste de Parny. Auguste de Riscourt de Lanux, who was my mother's father, was a cousin-german of Evariste Parny. The poet Parny is thus my great uncle, on my mother's side: the nephew and the uncle scarcely resemble each other."

"As for my father, he is of Norman and Breton origin. Our name is spelled thus in the ancient family papers: le Conte de Preval, younger branch. The Prevals only kept the name: *patronymic,* Le Conte. I was the first one to reunite the Le and the Conte, to avoid the appearance of a title."

Leconte de Lisle's father, who witnessed the French Revolution as a small child, served at the age of 23, in the Napoleonic campaign, in the Bavarian corps, as a surgeon. In 1816 he left for Bourbon, where he practised his profession and also cultivated the soil. In 1817 he married Mlle. Elysée de Riscourt de Lanux. A year later Charles-René-Marie Leconte de Lisle was born. The poet's grandfather was a pharmacist, who had received a good education at the College d'Avranches, and had written verse of a popular, didactic nature.

Since Taine the influence of *race* heredity has been greatly overestimated, but so-called racial traits may serve as convenient pegs on which to hang our ideas—by way of mnenomic aids if nothing else. There is something of the Gascon in the fire and exuberance of his nature. He never does things by halves. There is a partial truth in the statement of one of his critics that he always plays the full orchestra—no violin obligatos. Many of his poems show an exquisite grace and delicacy; but never moderately so. When he is delicate and exquisite he is intensely so, as in *Épiphanie,* for example.

When he is serene, his serenity is transcendent. When he is stormy he is like a tropical hurricane.

There is something of the Norman also in the stern, uncompromising side of his nature: the dogged pride, the austerity, and the tendency to gloom which we associate with the Norman races. However, there is little that is hereditary about his austereness, for his youthful portraits and letters show a great deal of sweetness and tenderness in his character.

Above all, we should think of him as a Breton, a Celt. Physically, morally, and spiritually he resembles the Celtic people. One has only to look at his portraits to see the actual resemblance.

His lofty conception of love, inwrought with that of the Celtic romances of chivalry, his flashes of piercing wit and irony recalling that of Swift or Shaw, his natural rebelliousness, and lastly his intense devotion to his dreams proclaim his Celtic kinship. All the desire of the Bretons and the Irish, to escape from the harsh world of reality to a spiritual, an ideal world; all the longing for the absolute and the divine is to be found to a high degree in Leconte de Lisle. In his twenty-first year he wrote to a friend: "I shall never love anything save my idealities, or rather my impossibilities." The escape from reality, which others of his race have sought in strong drink, or in mysticism, Leconte de Lisle sought in the realm of art.

In contrast to the traditional gaiety of the Gascon and Celtic temperaments is the poet's high seriousness. Apart from the slashing wit of his letters and conversations, there is no more humor in Leconte de Lisle than in Dante; less in fact if one considers the latter's Rabelaisian touches in the twenty-first canto of the *Inferno*—a rare concession made by the great Italian

to the popular taste of his day. "L'esprit gaulois," the great, hearty laughter of Rabelais, was entirely foreign to his nature, though he was by no means a prude. Nothing illustrates this point better than his poem, *La Source*. A nymph is bathing in a spring. A satyr spies her beauty and she flees. Like the Naiad, beauty should flee the touch of the profane, says the poet.

Aussitôt il rit d'aise en sa joie inhumaine;
Son rire émeut le frais réduit;
Et la vierge s'éveille, et pâlissant au bruit,
Disparaît comme une ombre vaine.
Telle que la Naiade, en ce bois écarté,
Dormant sous l'onde diaphane,
Fuis toujours l'œil impur et la main du profane,
Lumière de l'âme, ô Beauté!

To a friend our poet once remarked that he disliked Zola, because the latter had "made a filthy joke at the expense of Jesus Christ."

A trait in marked contrast to French character is his lack of sociability, his natural reserve. A three hundred and forty-five page book has been written about Leconte de Lisle and his friends; and the impression that one gains on reading it, is that to no poet of the nineteenth century, with the exception of Hugo, was paid more personal homage by the greatest men of his period than was paid to Leconte de Lisle. And yet, as Francis Grierson has pointed out, he was never a social lion. He had many admirers but few comrades, since only a very few were admitted to the sanctuary of his soul. He loved humanity, as is shown by his humanitarian activities, such as his efforts in freeing the slaves of Bourbon, whose release meant to him the end of all financial aid from his parents and of all hope of inheriting an independent income. He loved humanity largely

through the humanitarian sentiments which his father, a follower of Rousseau, had instilled in his youthful heart. However, the gregarious instinct was lacking in him. He avoided cafés, and crowds. In his youth his tendency to idealize made it difficult for him to keep his friends. He was constantly worshipping them, only to be disillusioned. As he wrote to his friend Rouffet, they were closer when they were apart.

Allied to his aloofness and a contributing cause to it was his youthful timidity. An uncle had complained of Leconte de Lisle's "cold and reserved character" to the latter's father, who replied that the boy was naturally timid, that he was not confiding or talkative. Perhaps his shyness was partly inherited, but more probably it was a result of childhood expansiveness receiving serious checks. His sensitiveness was equalled by his pride, and pride is his chief trait.

If he is unlike the majority of his compatriots in the matter of gaiety and sociability, he is like them in the strongly intellectual vein, which runs through his whole nature side by side with the vein of deep emotion.

Critics of the romantic school have laid a strong stress on the emotional element in art, and it is right that they should do so. However the shallowness of the claim that one cannot be intellectual and scholarly and still be a great poet, has been proven by Milton, that lover of "divine philosophy," and by the great Italian poets beginning with Dante and ending with Leopardi and Carducci.

In the French poet, the two natures are at times sharply distinct and even antagonistic. The struggle between the heart and brain which is always going on in every human being in a more or less marked degree, is extremely acute in this poet, and is the source of some

of his most poignant poetry. As the Spanish poet Bécquer wrote:

"Mientras el corazón y la cabeza
Batallando prosigan;
Mientras haya esperanzas y recuerdos,
Habrá poesía!"

"As long as the heart and brain
Will go on warring;
As long as there are hopes and memories,
There will be poetry!"

Leconte de Lisle has the same love of clear and distinct ideas that characterizes not only the philosophers of France, from Descartes to Comte, but also nine out of every ten Frenchmen. He must reason from a knowledge of the facts and doubt what he cannot prove, though like all human beings he longs to believe in his dreams. If the latter seem very real, and persistent, and are backed by a flood of pent-up feeling, as in the case of Pascal and Leconte de Lisle, the result is a tragedy—a tragedy of temperament. In the case of Pascal, it is the belief in positive reality which is sacrificed, in spite of the strong grip with which the man of science in him clings to it. In the case of Leconte de Lisle it is the will to believe in the supernatural, in dreams, which is torn away by his intellect, in spite of his fierce passion for "his idealities or rather his impossibilities."[1] This tragedy of two incompatible temperaments we can only read between the lines in the writings of Pascal and in a few scattered phrases like the poignant: "L'éternel silence de ces espaces infinis m'effraie." "The eternal silence of that infinite space fills me with fear." It is expressed with admirable

[1] From an early letter.

clearness and vigor throughout the poetry of Leconte de Lisle, and gives it a depth that could only come from the profound struggle of a human soul. It is not without significance that the last volume of poems which he himself was to publish should be called *Poèmes tragiques.*

Though Leconte de Lisle is generally acknowledged to be, with de Vigny, one of the greatest philosophical poets of France, he is not a thinker in the sense of having produced original ideas. Moreover, as a poet it is in his emotional rather than his intellectual nature that we are chiefly interested. The mere fact that Leconte de Lisle had a keen intellect seemed to lend support to the charge of antagonistic critics that the poet was cold and insensible. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Echoing this note of hostile criticism one of his English critics charged him with passivity. Meaning to prove that he was unemotional, he says that Leconte de Lisle scarcely ever mentions strong winds in his descriptions of nature. It is true that Leconte de Lisle is often passive, but in the sense that Spinoza uses the word throughout his *Ethics,* viz., in the sense of being acted upon by his environment and moved to passion, instead of being a man of action and moulding his surroundings to suit his will. As for the example of strong winds, I know of no more forceful depictions of a tempest than occur in *Pantouns Malais,* and *L'Albatros*:

> Le vent beugle, rugit, siffle, rale et miaule,
> Et bondit à travers l'Atlantique tout blanc. . . .

This critic has also forgotten *Effets de lune* which is nothing more than a powerful description of a storm at sea, and other poems, which show only one thing: the man's unfamiliarity with the author he is criticis-

ing. I have cited this simply as a typical piece of criticism on the point in question.

What seems at first glance to show a lack of feeling on the part of the poet, is his frequent use of the words *peace, serenity, impassibility,* and "néant divin" as ideals. Certainly impassibility was an ideal with Leconte de Lisle, and he longed to attain it because his inner life was torn by passions—the *Birds of Prey* of his poem by that name. If he succeeded in bringing serenity into his life it was by *katharsis,* by giving vent to his passions in his lyrics. Croce clarifies the seeming paradox in his *Esthetics* (p. 24) ". . . ; time after time it is common to attribute to artists the maximum of sensibility or passion and the maximum of insensibility or Olympian serenity." The sensibility, he goes on to explain, refers to the emotion which was the substance from which the poem was created, while the insensibility and serenity is a question of the "form through which the tumult of sensations and passions is overcome." It is the longing to escape from the unbearable intensity of his feelings, through art, philosophy, and even death, which Leconte de Lisle is constantly expressing, and which is surely evidence of a strongly emotional nature rather than an unfeeling one.

Another fact that has tended to support the theory of his adverse critics, is his belief that a poet should not parade his personality. Whether or not this doctrine is false, we shall consider in the second chapter. The fact remains that all his poems are colored with personal feeling, as we shall show in Part II.

We shall next attempt to analyze the nature of his most fundamental and frequently recurring emotions, those which may be considered as the basis of his temperament.

Lyric universality is the adequate expression of definite emotions common to all men; and poetic genius is, roughly speaking, the creative imagination which adequately projects such emotions, which are possessed by the poet to a greater degree than by other men, and felt more keenly, with a greater sensitiveness. Chief among the emotions is the feeling of self, with its two poles, pride and humility. It is the motive power which gives the greatest force to human action and feeling.

The same idea was stated by La Rochefoucauld in one of his maxims (No. 339). "We do not feel our joys and our sorrows except in proportion to the feeling of self" (Amour-propre). This is made somewhat clearer by another maxim (No. 469): "One never ardently desires what is desired merely through the dictates of reason," meaning that desires are based on instincts and emotions, and that, as stated in the previous maxim, the sentiment of self, if not one of the strongest of the instincts and emotions, at least gives strength to all others. Not until recently have its workings been studied scientifically, notably by McDougall, in his *Social Psychology*. La Rochefoucauld unfortunately confused it with selfishness and treats it in a satiric vein, little realizing that he was close to a great discovery.

In literary criticism its rôle has been neglected as far as I know except in Woodberry's splendid essay on Byron, and in Cesareo's *Life of Leopardi,* where he speaks of the "sentimento di se," as one of the four strongest emotions in the great Italian poet. However, he fails to apply it in his actual analysis of Leopardi's works, and says that *La Ginestra* is an expression of the "intellectual sentiment" of the poet. Intellectual sentiment is obviously a confusion in terms. *La Ginestra* is a clear example of the expression of the positive and

negative self-regarding sentiment, as McDougall would call it.

The other names for this emotion, in a more or less pure state, are (besides pride and humility) ambition and resignation, the love of glory and self-abnegation. It makes for altruism as well as selfishness, it drives us to be martyrs as well as tyrants. It is the foundation of the Christian religion, in its primitive form, for on its negative side, namely, humility, it was the prevailing emotion of Christ. In a similar way it is the great driving force behind the negative phase of Buddhism, the *effacement* of self. In metaphysics it is the basis of most of modern philosophical idealism. The climax of idealistic thinking is in the conception of ultimate reality as the projection of Absolute Self, or God. Even Kant, who rests his proof of the existence of God on an innate force that impels us to do right, built his metaphysics on the positive self-regarding sentiment, the great spring of moral action.

Like all emotions it may be not only a source of action but also an end in itself, material for contemplative philosophy, and more specifically for art. It is pride, the deepest trait underlying the works of Pierre Corneille, which is expressed in his chief dramas, where in the struggle with love, it usually triumphs. It is customary to speak of it as the sense of duty, but duty is rather the intellectual concomitant. In Corneille's *Horaces* it is pride and love of glory; in *Polyeucte* it is pride and self-abasement, the positive and the negative poles of the emotion. Were it only a matter of duty in the usual sense of the term, his plays would simply be moral treatises, whereas they have a strong emotive and aesthetic value.

If the sentiment of self is one of the strongest emo-

tions in every human being, in Leconte de Lisle it is found in extraordinary intensity. All who came in contact with him were struck by his impelling sentiment of pride. It is the source of much of his poetry, though expressed indirectly, or impersonally. One of his earliest poems, *Le Départ,* written when he was nineteen, contains certain lines which give us an intimate view of his personality. He describes with feeling the evenings spent in conversation with his friends, on the beach beside the mighty murmuring ocean, talking of "fame and poetry."

> Douces discussions, intime causerie
> Qui se tissait toujours de glorie et poésie.

In the collection of poems and letters written to his friend Rouffet, while studying at Rennes, there are numerous indications of the strength of his youthful pride. In his preface to the volume, Guinaudeau remarks that, on reading the book, all in all, your estimation will be "that Leconte de Lisle already has the lyric sweep, a certain melancholy, a passionate nature keenly sensitive to delicate impressions, breadth and splendor of vision, and a *sentiment of self and pride in himself,* that are more than promising." He tells how in 1864 Leconte de Lisle, when asked to write a series of articles on the chief poets, declared before formulating his judgments: "I am too proud to be unjust." As Guinaudeau says: "He was too proud, from 1838 on, to be unjust to himself. He was a severe critic for others; but he began by being merciless in regard to his own works."

As evidences of this intense ambition let me cite a few examples from these youthful letters and poems. He writes to Rouffet: "I know that in my pride—and

it would be impossible for me to conceal it—I have a longing to dominate that at times is stronger than my very will." At that time he was continually preoccupied by the desire, natural enough, to have a volume of their poems jointly printed. When all else failed, and it was suggested that it could be published by subscription, he exclaims: "I would prefer never to publish a line than owe it to the pity of the mob. What can you expect? If we cannot sell our poems we shall remain unknown: it will be the last and the cruellest of our disillusions."

In one of his poems he repeats the idea expressed in *Le Départ*. The line is changed only slightly; the word genius is substituted for poetry.

Alors que je rêvais de gloire et de génie.

His longing to be great dates from an early period, and received many checks. According to the Freudian school of psychologists, a desire which cannot be satisfied by realization is suppressed and satisfied vicariously in dreams, day dreams, and sometimes ultimately in artistic creation. Frequently the fancies take the form of symbols, since the suppression is so thoroughgoing that a direct mental fulfilment of the desire would be barred even from the semi-consciousness of the dream state. Most of the so-called Freudian symbols have been interpreted as expression of suppressed sex wishes, since love in all its manifestations plays a much greater part in our general mental life than we have realized heretofore. This particular school of psychology has failed to realize however the power of the self-regarding instinct, and the emotions that accompany it. It is a well known fact that love, powerful though it is, will not survive scorn. It may not be true that pride is

stronger than love, but it is certain that the domain of both is vast. What La Rochefoucauld said 250 years ago is still true today: "No matter what discoveries may have been made in the land of pride, many regions still remain unexplored." From the *First Poems* of Leconte de Lisle we learn that his intense ambition and longing to produce something great, as expressed in his letters, had literally become his "constant dream." In other words, through the unsympathetic attitude of his parents and relatives toward his literary aspirations, and his enforced isolation on the island, far from the literary world of France, the deepest of his emotions had been largely checked. Thus through constant repression they had become fixed in his subconscious mind in the shape of suppressed desires, which sought expression in the form of dreams and symbols.

In the formation of the creative imagination, youthful suppressions are of the first importance. The most original of the *First Poems* are those in which he gives poetic form to these dreams and symbols. Chief among the latter is the image of an eagle, soaring above the world, which occurs in at least four of these early poems. In a poem entitled *Saint Jean* he uses the eagle ostensibly as an image of St. John the Divine, associating with the eagle the impossibility of understanding it in its flights. It is also associated with glory, pride, and scorn. The eagle, or better perhaps, St. John and the eagle together, symbolize the self-regarding sentiment seeking expression in poetic flights that are misunderstood by those around him, but rising scornfully above its surroundings, finally achieves immortality, in other words literary fame.

In *Contemplation* (1838) he ends thus:

Abîmes aimantes où s'envolent les âmes
Commes les aigles au soleil,
Et toi, brûlante extase, ineffable délire,
Noble aspiration des cieux, qui nous fait lire
Sur le vieux univers: amour, gloire, beauté,
Enivre mes regards de merveilles sacrées,
Et traçant par les airs des routes ignorées,
Plonge-moi dans l'éternité!

Once more we have the soaring eagle, the vision of glory, and the idea of immortality. In a certain sense, like *Saint Jean* it is a religious poem, but none the less both poems have their base in love of fame. This point is clearer in a poem entitled *Hallucinations,* wherein occurs a semi-religious vision of a flight; he plunges, "like an eagle" through the firmament to behold at last, not God, but "the oriental angel, the celestial poet Israfil, the melodious spirit, with a cloud of gold crowning his fair head." In *Aux Montagnes natales,* there are two distinct symbols of this emotion: first, the albatross, which he calls " the eagle of our shores," and second, the mountains "that proudly raise their solitary crests." In the poem called *Tristesse,* which he addresses to his mother, he pleads for the poets, contrasting them with those who are devoted to making money, and exclaims in regard to the latter: "Are they better than we? Although something impelling us toward glory and the good forever lives within us!"

In another poem *A Lélia* (1839, p. 166) he ends the second part of the poem with the words, "Genius is pride." Certainly for Leconte de Lisle a great part of his poetic genius is due to the strength of this emotion, and the adequacy with which his creative imagination was able to express it in his later poems.

If pride was stronger than love in Leconte de Lisle,

the latter instinct was powerful, none the less. Even more than in the case of his ambition and longing for glory, we know that love was actively suppressed in his early youth and thus became a permanent part of his creative imagination.

Instincts are like electric currents, which may be used to turn the wheels of a motor, or do other useful work. The currents may also be passed through wires so slender or resistant that the energy is transformed into light. Thus the sex instinct, the purpose of which is to perpetuate the race, is through strong resistance transformed into dreams, symbols, platonic inspiration, and mysticism, which find their best expression in poetry.

As yet we know relatively few details about the early love affairs of the poet. However one of his earliest poems written in his 'teens gives us an idea of his intensely passionate nature.

> Sais-tu que le baiser, sur tes levres cueilli,
> Est un feu délirant, le seul rayon ami
> Dont mon âme se dore?
> Sais-tu bien que je tremble en écoutant ta voix?
> Que la fièvre me prend, lorsque je t'aperçois . . .
> Sais-tu qu'en te touchant je ne sens plus ma main,
> Que mon cœur palpitant s'échappe de mon sein . . .
> Et moi je suis contraint, au seul bruit de tes pas,
> De m'appuyer bien vite,
> Car ma tête est en feu, mon front est énivré,
> Mes pieds semblent fléchir et mon regard troublé
> Et te cherche et t'évite.

It is not great poetry, but I quite agree with Marius-Ary Leblond, that the feverous sensation of burning, the disturbance of all thought, the quickening of his pulse, the trembling, and the need of catching himself for fear of falling, the attraction and hesitation "are not mere

lyrical metaphors, but the exact expression of the passionate nature of the young Creole.''

After seeing a performance of the actress Léontine Fay, he wrote to Rouffet:

Is it not astonishing, my friend, that beauty should act so powerfully at times on our souls? . . . You must have felt it! As for me, here is what I feel every time I see and hear Léontine Fay. Good heavens! What a child I still am! For two weeks I am restless, nervous, incapable of any work; I can scarcely even write you, my ideas are so confused. Nervous shivers run from head to foot . . . my head aches . . . the air is so warm! . . . Even while I am writing this, my heart beats as though it would burst my breast.

In his first story, *Mon Premier amour en prose,* we have further confirmation of the intensity of his early loves.

My first love assailed me like a blast of wind. For I was in love, in love with the most captivating girl in the whole Torrid Zone, whose skin had the warm tone of the orange, and whose hair was darker than the wing of the mountain martin. How I loved her for it! I loved her for her large eyes more sparkling than the star of the sea that casts a triple reflection on the swells above the reef, and so deeply in love was I, so fascinated, with a heart so overflowing with joy . . . that I fell ill that very evening; for I would not eat nor drink, nor talk, nor sleep, and had become as pale as one of those sorrowful looking persons they call poets!

All who knew Leconte de Lisle intimately, and those who have carefully studied his life, particularly his early life, are convinced that fundamentally, he was intensely passionate, ''terriblement passionné'' to use the words of Guinaudeau. Leconte de Lisle had an uncle M. de Lanux who had ignored the powerful color preju-

dice, and had married a mulatto. From this marriage, which had caused a break between the uncle and the other branches of the family, was born a girl with singular seductiveness and charm. It was the old story of Romeo and Juliet. Calmette relates that one day after suddenly beholding her the youthful poet was so carried away by his love that he rushed home, and breathlessly declared that his cousin was a "marvel" and that he intended to marry her. Surprised by the suddenness of the declaration and the fear that her son might carry out his intention his mother fainted. In addition to the obstacle presented by his family, there were two others, that proved unsurmountable. As we already know, the young poet was extremely timid, and the girl must have been sensitive as to her position as a quadroon, and extremely proud. There was also a still greater obstacle, if, as Houssaye asserts, Mlle de Lanux was the heroine of *Mon Premier amour en prose.* In the story, the writer tells how his love was killed by witnessing the cruelty of the young girl to a slave. His affection, strong as it was, could not withstand his scorn for such injustice and heartlessness.

There is evidence of his having been in love more than once during his adolescence. M. Joseph Bédier, the distinguished French writer, has told me of a tradition in the Île Bourbon, that the young girl to whom Leconte de Lisle so frequently refers in his later poems as the "charm of his first dreams" belonged to the Bédier family. Whoever this person was, his love must have been deep, since the object of his youthful love returned persistently to his memory throughout his entire life, especially in periods of mental conflict.

It is most of all significant that there is no evidence that his love at this period of adolescence was ever re-

turned. The effect of the suppressions, which were due to timidity, scorn, and the lack of reciprocation, was to sublimate this love and force it into his subconsciousness, where it sought expression in ideational form: dreams, symbols, a sort of mystic love, and ultimately in poetry.

It is not improbable that his love for particular persons being thwarted, his emotion sought an outlet in another direction, the love of humanity in general. It also made him rather wary of passion. As time went on he seems to have faintly realized that there is a relation between the artistic expression of love and the unfulfilment of desire. His overwhelming ambition to produce great poems that would last as long as the heart of man, supported this distrust of passion. As Marius Ary-Leblond has pointed out, he was afraid to admit to himself his natural voluptuousness, incident to his youth in a tropical island where everything contributed to an early awakening of the senses.

> He fears that it might degenerate into sensuality that would dull the splendor of his dreams. Through an almost frenzied passion for purity, through the pride of self-mastery, through the modesty of a virgin soul, he obstinately wished to hide from himself the fact that he was naturally sensual (p. 95).

The phenomenon is by no means a new one. In Plato it is elevated into a system. As a base, the Greek philosopher selects the love between two individuals which is least possible of any real fulfilment, the love of two members of the same sex. The result of the combined stimulation and thwarting thus of love is to generate an intense emotion, the highest outlet for which is philosophical or artistic expression emanating from the subconscious levels of the mind. Similarly the origin

of the love poetry of the medieval poets of Provence is a systematized expression of love that was perhaps accounted impossible of fulfilment, the love of the poet for the wife of the noble who was his patron. The situation being rather precarious, naturally the nobles soon preferred that it should be unreal; and we find as a matter of a fact that it soon became a mere literary fashion, a sort of game. With Dante and Petrarch however the situation again became real. In *La Vita Nuova* we have a clear example of the psychology of an ardent nature, loving without hope of any physical realization of the emotion, which is translated into dreams or visions accompanied by a sort of religious ecstasy, and which finally gains complete expression in artistic form. The semi-mystic cult of beauty of Plato, Dante, and Leconte de Lisle has its roots in the same emotional phenomenon.

In a note to Jean Dornis, Leconte de Lisle relates that poetry was awakened in him at the age of fifteen, "thanks above all to the eternal first love, composed of vague desires and delightful timidities." (Jean Dornis, p. 3.)

Unable at first to find other expression, his love sought an outlet in an exalted friendship for a boy of his acquaintance, Adamolle. The passionate, spiritual quality of this relation is well expressed in the poet's letters of this period. Here are a few fragments from them.

As for you, my friend, my brother—let me call you that—I think you are too well aware of my affection, for it to be necessary for me to repeat that it will never be extinguished. . . . Oh! my dear Adamolle, how I regret that our language is inadequate to express the ardor of my friendship. . . . We are separated from each other, perhaps forever. . . . Oh! may memory, the only good thing that remains to us, bridge in a

certain sense the enormous space that keeps us apart, and may it counteract the bitterness of our regrets and the tears of absence! I see you, speak to you, I hold you in my arms!

There is an accent of mysticism in this fragment that reminds one of Plato. The chief bond of interest between the two young men was a virile enthusiasm for liberty and democracy, the love of humanity.

Another manifestation of love that has forcibly been separated from its original object is the love of love itself. In a poem enclosed in a letter he wrote:

> Ce but immense et pur, tendre et mystérieux,
> Chaste et brûlant reflet des temps religieux. . . .
> Ce saint oubli du mal, o frère, c'est l'amour.

As he says in a letter of the same period, 1838:

Must one love then, you say, when no hope is given us? Yes, my friend, one must love, because love is poetry, and without poetry, life is life no longer. But there are two kinds of love: the one, positive in character, having reality for its object; the other, vaster, and more sublime singing its own creations, which are all the more beautiful, since they are dreams.

The idea of these two kinds of love haunted his mind for many years, since each seemed as real to him as the other. In 1862 he published in *Les Poèmes Barbares* a poem entitled *Les deux Amours* which he withdrew from later editions as being too personal. There is the same accent of overwhelming passion that one finds in one of Dante's sonnets, showing that ardor and platonism (which has it foundation in the same instinct) ran side by side throughout his life.

In the *Chant Alterné* there is the same contrast of the two types of love. They are inseparable. Somewhere in

some of his notes Baudelaire speaks of mysticism and sensuality as the two poles of the same world. He was not far from the truth.

Gautier among others was struck by the seeming contradiction of Leconte de Lisle's nature and his conception of love. In his *Progrès de la poésie française* he writes:

> He was born in a climate of dazzling heat, where even the flowers are intoxicating, and seem to counsel revery, idleness, and voluptuousness. But nothing could soften and disintegrate his strong and quiet nature completely intellectual in its enthusiasm. For him the world exists only as changed into pure form, in the eternal sphere of art.

Thus we see that platonism with Leconte de Lisle was not a merely external literary fashion, as we may believe it to have been in Provence, or a cloak for licentiousness as it frequently was in the Italian Renaissance. It was something very positive and fundamental to Leconte de Lisle. To him it was far more vivid than the outer world of fact. He says in a letter to Rouffet: "You see, my friend, that my love is not quite as real as yours. Nevertheless, I assure you, there are moments when I feel the joy and even suffering incident to a a definite object, it is real in the sense of being an actual emotion, seeking the relief, the serenity, that results from articulation." In another letter he writes: " . . . I feel capable of experiencing in a month all the love, all the hate, and all the hope of a man that had given his whole life to it." Aside from the tone of youthful exaggeration, it indicates the force of the feelings that were seeking an outlet.

These and most of the other poems in this collection which Leconte de Lisle was so anxious to have published

in his youth, and which he condemned to oblivion in later years, do not so much express the emotions which he felt at this period as they do his longing to express them. In other words, the poet's maturer judgment of their artistic merit was correct, and yet they give us an insight which is extremely important and which helps us to better understand his later work.

In general, as the result of the suppressions of the self-regarding sentiment and of love, which we pointed out in detail, the poet tended to live in a world of dreams. Reality being harsh and oppressive, he constructed an ideal world wholly in the past, or in the future. Even in his twenties we find him always looking backward, or forward. In the present he is never happy. His hatred for the "existing" is always intense. In comparison with his marvelous visions, the world about him invariably seems ugly and petty. He longs for a new social order, in which mankind will be free and life will be harmonious and beautiful. He is attracted from the first by the humanitarian dreams of the Rousseauites and the Utopian socialists. On the other hand he reconstructs the distant past according to his longings and sees in ancient Greece the golden age. While he is in Bourbon he is ever dreaming of France as the saviour of humanity, the land that will make the social Utopia a reality. While he is in France, he recalls with fond regret the beauty of his tropical Eden, l'Île Bourbon.

Memory, transforming and beautifying his impressions, always played a large rôle in his life, sustaining him in the many hours of despondency that resulted from clashes with reality. As he said himself: "Memory never fails me when I am in need of it. . . ." In a poem, however, *Un Souvenir et un regret*, he tells of

his sadness, resulting from the contrast of his present surroundings with those of his past, seen through a golden mist. Like dreams, memory is the source of sorrow as well as joy. Musset was right when he said in *Souvenir* that for the poet there is no greater felicity, but Dante also spoke the truth when he wrote the famous lines:

Nessun maggior dolor . . .

The solution of the paradox is simple. The starting point is always an obstruction, and consequently, unhappiness. Similarly the contrast between the dream and reality only tends to emphasize the ugliness of the latter. The dream cannot last forever; the dreamer must always wake.

The poet's adolescence was a series of exaltations and depressions. The greater part of the letters and poems of his youth breathe a spirit of lofty vision, struggling for expression. There are also poems of deep discouragement, such as *Tristesse,* and messages like the following:

> I am now in a state of sadness and worry, for I do not know what will become of me. . . . There are moments of discouragement in which even enthusiasm is painful. It is impossible for me to analyze all my anger and depression.

Another general result of the various suppressions of his strong desires was the formation of another complex, the religious sentiment, which has its foundation, as M. Elsenberg points out, in a combination of "mystic love and the need of immortality." (*Le Sentiment religieux chez Leconte de Lisle.*)

Dante's Beatrice, you will remember, leads the poet from the particular to the abstract just as in Plato's system: from his love for her, and his worship of her

beauty and gentle qualities, to a chivalric cult of love and feminine beauty in general, and from natural beauty to the divine, to the eternal—to God.

In summing up our studies of the chief elements in our poet's emotional nature, let me say another word in regard to his sensibility. If our analysis is of no other value it must show at least that the poet responded with the utmost sensitiveness to his environment. This particular portion of the study has purposely been confined almost exclusively to his adolescence. It is there that one can discover what is innate. Later the issues are obscured; but from what we know of the youth we shall be in a position to understand the man, and feel with more intensity the expression of his fundamental longings. We shall be in a position furthermore to see what the critics mean when they say that the poet's love was "intellectual," and we shall be able to discount completely those who claim that he was cold and apathetic.

Leconte de Lisle was not only extremely sensitive and emotional by nature, but also extremely sensuous. Sights and movements impressed themselves on his brain with unusual frequency and force, and reappeared again in his poetry, clothing his emotions in the form of images. He is, indeed, as Gautier said of himself, "a man for whom the visible world exists," and he is also a man for whom the invisible world exists. But whether he is describing a scene which he has observed on his native island, or describing an imaginary dream world, his images are always vigorous and abundant, rendering with life-like entirety the sights and sounds, the movements, even the feeling, the very odors.

The sensory element though less important than the

emotional and instinctive, cannot be neglected if we would have a clear understanding of the force and quality of the poet's imagination and know in just what manner it differs from that of other poets. In each of us, some one or more of our senses are peculiarly vivid, while others are correspondingly faint. In the case of a poet it is fairly easy to discover this basic texture of his mind, by counting the relative frequency with which the various images occur in his work.

Averaging the frequency of definite sense images of Villon, Ronsard, Lamartine, Musset and Hugo, five of the chief lyric poets who preceded him, we find the following interesting result. There are twice as many images in the work of Leconte de Lisle as in that of any predecessor. After Leconte de Lisle comes Hugo, with about half as many, next Lamartine and Musset with the same number, then Ronsard, and lastly Villon. It is interesting to note that they follow inversely in the chronological order. Villon and Hugo are both relatively visual. Lamartine, who entitled one of his volumes of verse *Les Harmonies,* we are not surprised to find is auditory. Musset has a relatively large number of touch images, while motor or kinesthetic images are relatively predominant in Ronsard and Leconte de Lisle. In most human beings the visual images are, I believe, the most frequent; and this is the case in each of these poets. Gustatory and olfactory images are seldom found. However, it is simply a case of comparative frequency. Baudelaire, who was analyzed separately, was found to have a remarkably high percentage of olfactory images, which confirms the usual statement of the critics in this respect.

Leconte de Lisle in addition to being kinesthetic is

highly visual, much more so even than Hugo. He equals Lamartine in the power of his auditory sense, and is about the average in his other senses. His extraordinary power of seeing and reproducing movements, and secondly, forms, colors, and above all, light, give his poetry that remarkable life and vividness that makes it without a rival in the field of poetic description in all French literature.

Images with him, as with all artists, are something more, however, than mere pictures. If they do not translate emotions they are only partly fulfilling their poetic purpose. In Part II, I shall show how Leconte de Lisle succeeds in conveying the feelings which he wishes to express by means of his rich and varied depictions.

I have attempted a dynamic portrayal of the inner man; now let me give a portrait of him as he appeared to his contemporaries, and then give the facts of his early life. Leconte de Lisle was handsome. His physique, like his verse, reminds one of a statue by Michael Angelo—a combination of grace and strength. According to Jean Dornis, even in his later years his body seemed youthful and vigorous; he was an excellent horseman and a good swimmer. His pictures show an erect carriage, a proud bearing.

A portrait of the poet in his thirty-second year, by Jobbé Duval, shows the same union of virility and softness, intensity and repose. According to those who knew him, the word that best summarizes his bearing, and the expression of his features, is the word nobleness. "His brow," to use the words of Armand Silvestre, "has the majesty of a Temple. The look of an

eagle dwells within his eyes. His race is that of the gods of whom he sang.'' His gaze is extremely interesting. It is penetrating, steadfast and serene; it is proud, like his bearing, and contains a depth of feeling in reserve. The nose is ''straight and willful'' according to Verlaine; the chin bold and regular. As for the expression of the mouth, it is difficult to analyze. The lips are full, but firm. They contribute to the general impression of vigorous serenity, of richness, and of force.

Michelet in his essay, *The Sea,* has drawn a portrait of the frigate-bird that always reminds me of Leconte de Lisle. It seems to sum up, in symbolic fashion, the innermost nature of the poet.

> It is the little eagle of the sea, the first of the winged race, the daring navigator who never furls his sail, the prince of storms that contemplates all dangers, the warrior, or frigate-bird. . . . Then is the time that we are filled with longing, when in the burning azure of the tropics, we see at incredible heights, passing in triumph, almost imperceptible in the distance, the dark bird amid that solitude, alone in the deserted sky.

Leconte de Lisle was born at Saint-Paul, a quiet town on the Île Bourbon. In his third year he was taken to Brittany, where he remained until he was ten; returning at that age to his native Island, where he lived for nine more years, the most impressionable period of his life. The beauty of Brittany must have seemed bare and pale beside the clear splendor and varied richness of the tropical island. The number of northern landscapes in his poems is few in comparison with those of the South. The strong exotic current in modern French literature, ''the longing of the pine tree for the palm,''

is often external, and gives an impression of artificiality, while that of Leconte de Lisle is native, exact, and vigorous.

It is easy to exaggerate the importance of his early natural surroundings in the development of his poetic genius. It is certain, however, that his keen senses stored up indelible impressions, which were of inestimable value in the formation of his later poems. The materials, so to speak, of his poems, he largely owes to the beauty of the island paradise.

His early education was of a sort to facilitate his absorption of the natural beauty of his surroundings. He was brought up like Rousseau's *Émile,* by a father who was a strong believer in the theories of the eighteenth century philosophers. Little or no coercion was used in regard to his studies. The great book of Nature was there close at hand, always open. According to tradition, he absented himself for days at a time from the boarding school where he was sent to study in Saint-Denis. Much of his time was spent in the library, reading at random, particularly the works of the poets; but most of it seems to have been passed in walks, along the beach, or into the hills, dreaming the long, long dreams of youth, and drinking in the sights and sounds, and above all the pulsing movement, the stir of life about him.

The tropical skies, serene and burning, seem to reflect his soul, just as his verse is symbolized by the great volcanic mountains of the island, which had their being in a profound upheaval, rising and taking on their purity of outline, in a flow of incandescent rock, while now they calmly tower, radiating an impression of eternity.

The house where he passed his youth was on a hillside, overlooking the sea, where his vision would plunge uninterruptedly for miles and miles. He came to know the sea intimately in all its moods, and acquired a taste for the vastness of its horizons.

It was the poetry of Victor Hugo that first revealed to him the beauty of his island. In an essay on Hugo he describes a mountain torrent:

> When the rains of the torrid zone have ceased falling in heavy sheets, on the summits and rocky amphitheaters in the interior of the island where I was born, the Eastern breezes drive afar the mighty avalanche of clouds, that scatter in the sunlight; and the gathered waters suddenly break the barriers of the natural reservoirs. They tumble headlong through the mountain clefts they call ravines, stairways of some six or seven leagues, bristling with wild vegetation, rugged as the ruin of some gigantic tower of Babel. The masses of foam, from top to bottom, in torrents, in cataracts, with extraordinary roarings, fall, plunge, rebound, and are swallowed up again. Here and there, sheltered from the furious currents, quiet birds and splendid flowers of the great creeping vines bathe in little mossy basins hollowed from the lava and sparkling in the light. Close beside them the waters roll, now pale, now flaming in the sunlight, carrying away herds of bellowing oxen, little islands, and uprooted tamarind trees tossing the dark plumes of their foliage in the current. The waters descend each moment more impetuously; reach the sea, and force their way through the swells, conquering the ocean. There is something of this in the genius and in the work of Victor Hugo.

If we would thus depict the genius and work of Leconte de Lisle by a landscape, we would ask him to describe the ocean of the tropics after a typhoon. The giant swells would be dashing with herculean force against the

high rock cliffs, and yet their deep, blue surface would be smooth, and gracefully undulating, as far as the eye could distinguish, except where they would break, across the triple reefs, in strips of dazzling white beneath the azure sky.

There is a certain similarity between the landscape of the Île Bourbon and that of Greece: the mountains and the sea, the extraordinary clearness of the atmosphere and the brightness of the sun that render the distant outlines distinct and sharp. Certain descriptions of the ancient Sicily of the Greeks gain in vividness in the adaptations of the French poet, through his familiarity with just such scenes. There is a suggestion also of India, in the luxuriant vegetation, the giant flowers and feverish odors of the East, the burning heat and blinding light of his native Island in the Indian Ocean.

Before we leave the question of the part played by nature in his life and work, it should be noted that his poetry is almost exclusively out-of-doors poetry. Even his "interiors," often take place in a garden courtyard or a veranda where the bees and the birds may enter at will. No wonder that in criticizing Béranger he should have said: "A poet can only be a free spirit, deeply moved by natural beauty, vast horizons, mountains, and native valleys." No wonder that in his later years, passed in the cramped quarters of a Paris apartment, he should have evoked with longing the scenes of his youth in that Eden of the southern seas.

In addition to his education in the manner of Rousseau, largely left to nature, there were other influences at work which were to bear fruit in his verse. In religion, his mother was orthodox. His father was not. It is a disputed point, whether or not his father was the first

to arouse a hatred of the Church and to instill in him the cult of "Reason." At all events, before his nineteenth year we find him copying in a note book the following words by the Abbé Raynal: " 'Reason,' says Confucius, 'is an emanation of divinity; the supreme law is merely the agreement of nature and reason; any religion that contradicts these two guiding principles of human life is an infamous lie.' " "Such," he adds in a note, "is the religion of Christ, in its degenerate state." It should be noted that all his life he felt a strong reverence for Christ. His feeling, however, was like Dante's that the Church had become corrupt. The "iniquity of Rome" was a favorite topic in his talks with youthful friends at this period. He felt that the teachings of Christ had been perverted. Unlike Dante he was unable to brook for a moment the authority of the Church.

Other sayings and verses which he copied and his conversations with his companions showed a keen interest in freedom and democracy, that never left him. Likewise we know that he had the courage of his convictions. The wealth and easy life of the planter in the tropics was due entirely to slave labor. The cruelty of the masters was often incredible. The whites did not think of the negroes as being human like themselves, and treated them like cattle. The father of the poet had instilled in him the humanitarianism of the eighteenth century, but he himself dealt in slaves and shared the prejudices of his neighbors. Leconte de Lisle on the contrary had read Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's denunciation of cruelty to the colored races, and his keen sensibility suffered from their inhuman treatment. Thoughts of their emancipation were mingled with his dreams of liberty.

Already he had begun to write verse, in a hesitating style, expressive of his youthful melancholy. Here and there are certain expressions, which show his early hatred for the harshness of reality, and his tendency to seek escape in dreams.

Je sens à mes soupirs
Que réelle est ma vie.

It is poor poetry as a rule, and the poet did well to suppress these early works; yet they help us the better to appreciate the works of his maturity. They have one merit, however, that they share with the latter—their musicalness. The youth was fond of music and wrote a number of poems to be sung.

In 1837 he was sent to Brittany to complete his education. During the voyage the ship stopped at Cape Town. He describes the animals he saw. Already we detect in him a faculty that is universally admired in his poetry: the ability to see the important traits in animals and portray them faithfully. Later the ship stopped at Saint Helena. Dreaming of the greatness of Napoleon and condemning his shifting policies, he wrote, that gradually "respect and pity gave way to scorn and hate; it is the fate of tyrants, and Napoleon was only a tyrant after all—greater than the other tyrants; but for that very reason, more guilty."

In Brittany he lived with an uncle, a severe, narrow-minded magistrate. The two often clashed, and we learn from the letters of the father, exhorting his son to try and please the uncle, that the poet was "careless and easy going, quite indifferent to the morrow." At one time he displeased his relative by going off with some young artists on an excursion through the Province.

After receiving his degree of *Bachelier* rather to his own surprise, he entered the Law School of the University of Rennes. He soon found that he had no taste for the Law, which he described in a letter as being "ignoble hocus-pocus" that fairly nauseated him. At the end of the first year he wished to give it up and study medicine instead, though he knew at heart that no vocation would satisfy him save that of writing.

At various times having broken more or less with his uncle, he learned at an early age to know poverty, and support it with fortitude. From his university days on he seldom had more than the strict necessaries of life —but for him the chief necessity was an opportunity for artistic expression. In one of his essays Baudelaire remarks that it is possible to live for a day without bread, but not without poetry. For a man like Leconte de Lisle the saying is true. Besides poetry he also had the theatre, of which he was passionately fond at this period.

Obliged to give up hopes of publishing a volume of verse at this time, he co-operated with other young men at Rennes, mostly students, who were aspiring to be authors, and were publishing a review, *La Variété*. His talent and literary zeal soon gained him the position of "President of the editorial staff." "It is still very little," he wrote, "but after all it is the first step upward."

The group of young men connected with the review, were for the most part typical Bretons of the day, with strong, though liberal, religious tendencies. What were the feelings and ideas of Leconte de Lisle in regard to religion at this period? The various authors disagree on this particular point. M. Elsenberg's thesis on *Le*

Sentiment religieux chez Leconte de Lisle is enlightening in this respect, and seems to me to be nearest the truth. I believe that at this period, owing largely to the influence of his friends, his strongly spiritual nature accepted religion in the broad sense of the word.

Let us be more precise. I have shown how the suppression of powerful instincts tended to alienate him from reality, and cause him to take refuge in his dreams. All the elements of religious aspirations are present. However, his keen intellect and the scientific and philosophic tendencies of his early training and the times in which he lived pulled him away from the supernatural to the natural. Except perhaps for a brief period of his student days with which we are not as yet fully acquainted, he was unable to believe the dogmas of religion, in spite of the depth of his aspirations toward the supernatural.

What happened is characteristic of the nineteenth century. His religious sentiment took the form of a cult of Beauty. Art and religion are closely allied, and both are akin to metaphysics. It was at this period that the poet read George Sand's *Sept cordes de la lyre*, and was considerably influenced by it. He might have said with Albertus, "No. The Divinity that I serve is that of Pythagoras and Plato, as well as that of Christ," and likewise the words: "Yes, I understand that doubt may be religious and dreams divine."

After completing his law studies in 1843, he returned once more to the Île Bourbon, where he was to pass two of the unhappiest years of his life. He established himself as a lawyer in the capital, Saint Denis. An uncompromising idealist, the technical subterfuges of many of his colleagues and the petty quarrels of his clients were a source of constant irritation and unhappiness. More

galling still was the cruelty to the slaves that he constantly witnessed. It had angered him in his youth, and yet familiarity had rendered it less striking. Returning now from France he saw it more clearly and responded with a sensibility that seemed abnormal to his relatives, who frequently upbraided him for it. In the Île Bourbon, too, his literary activities were necessarily checked. He had taken the "first step upward," and now the path to greatness was suddenly blocked. He was laughed at as "the poet" by those who should have been the first to recognize his genius and aid him. In France he had been able to share the great humanitarian dreams that were animating society. Here there was no room for them. His one friend, Adamolle, was absent. No wonder he was unhappy and lived in isolation!

These two years are a period of introspection and meditation, passed in the contemplation of the wondrous beauty of the island, and in philosophical speculation. It is a period of germination. His poetic forces, instead of being dissipated in other activities were being concentrated. His emotions were gathering like the rains in the natural reservoirs on the mountain slope, to burst their barriers at last, in verse.

In 1845 he received an invitation through a friend, to write for the *Démocratie Pacifique,* a journal under the management of Victor Considérant for the propagation of the socialistic ideas of Fourrier. Here was an opportunity to escape the isolation of the Île Bourbon, to be in the great intellectual and artistic center, to combat for his humanitarian ideas, to write, to ascend once more the path of glory. At first he refused, on the grounds that his convictions were not identical with those of the editors, which, according to M. Ary-Leblond were milder than his own. Writing to Adamolle he said

that he was not a "man to write against his conscience, IN ANY WAY WHATSOEVER," and that one must guard against "being forced to despise one's self." This incident is one of many which show the nobleness of his pride and how far it was removed from personal vanity, or egotism. Being reassured, however, that he could hold his own views, he accepted the position, which he held for three of the most important years in the history of the socialist press: 1845–1848. He also contributed to the *Phalange,* another important socialist journal.

His humanitarian and radical activities have been admirably studied by the brothers Marius and Ary Leblond. Though there is apparently a sharp cleavage between his propaganda and his poetry, these years of actual socialistic effort fall within the formative years of his life, and attach themselves to some of the poet's deepest characteristics. They prove that he was no mere esthete, detached from humanity. They show his lack of selfishness, and show his interest, less in individuals, than in groups of human beings—in mankind in general. To fully appreciate his verse we must realize this fully.

Nothing will give a better idea of his activities at this period than his own words from an article written in 1846, entitled *Justice and Right.*

If there is a faith fixed unshakably in the heart of man; if there is an idea always visible to the eyes of each and all, surely it is the faith that concerns justice, the ideal that spells the triumph of social rights here on earth. Justice and Right! They are the sacred interests, the eternal idols of great hearts:! From Buddha to Jesus, from Confucius to Socrates, from Arnold of Brescia to Huss, from Rousseau to the National Convention of the Revolution, in the tumultuous course of the centuries, in the thickest of the struggle,

in the midst of the doubts and ignorance of the peoples, firm voices and hearts inspired have prophesied the reign of justice and right; holy words that embrace the future. . . .

Religious liberty has been won. At what a price is well known. The right to life has not been won as yet. What is vast wealth in the hands of a few? The negation of the right of all to live. What is the wage system? The negation of liberty. What results from the present state of things? The negation of justice. This means just so many crimes against humanity. Let everyone think it over; let them think it over again, at all times.

In another article, *Oppression and Poverty,* he is still more ardent in his faith. With him it is a veritable religion—the cult of humanity.

The day is far from us when man first said to man: "Your sweat and your blood belong to me; live and die! I shall feed on your tears and your flesh."—The day is far from us when man first said to woman: "Bow thy head; thou who art weak; love and suffer; thou owest me everything and nothing is owing to thee."

And yet the day has lasted centuries.

Now with the iron scepter in hand, now according to the changing times, skillfully disguised in the cloak of lawmakers, and parading venerable names, oppression has ruled, always alert, always inexorable, always the master of the world. It brutally bent both man and woman to its will in the days of violence and of barbarism; then it walked with brow uncovered and held high; and all men said: "Behold it!" And all men grew accustomed to kneel before it.

In epochs of civilization, that is to say, of ruse and lying, of betrayal and cowardly selfishness, it lied, betrayed, and exploited for its own benefit, sneaking and invisible. It has always reigned, and still reigns.

Happy are the priests of money, the autocrats of the civilized world.

We have seen them gleaning on the battle fields, and growing fat on the blood and flesh of dying nations. Soon we shall see them buying one another, and selling men to one another like cattle, for where will their power end, in these invasions?

Poverty and hunger have conquered the world, the world of the disinherited, the lost children of humanity, the masses, the eternal band of the weak.

Oppression! Poverty! . . . You have an enemy that is stronger than you; it is coming, and the sound of its steps already comes to your ears. The ground is trembling beneath its advance, the air is filled with its spirit; many announce it, with heart and lips.

The day when you will stand face to face; you, duplicity, facing frankness; you, falsehood, facing truth; you, brute force, facing the right. That day you will have lived your life, for the enemy that is coming is justice!

The rôle of Leconte de Lisle in the revolutionary days of 1848 is best exemplified in his action in regard to the emancipation of the slaves, in the French colonies. During the three years preceding, he had published a number of tales, several of which were written to show the negro and the planters in a true light: both, good by nature, but more or less corrupted by the unnatural relation of oppressed and oppressor. It is interesting to note in passing that he declared that the lot of the factory worker in Europe, working at a machine for long hours on starvation wages, was worse than that of a black slave in the colonies.

When the provisional government of the new republic decreed the emancipation of the slaves on all French territory, a movement was set on foot to weaken the adhesion of the colonies to the new régime. At this point Leconte de Lisle and other young enthusiasts from the Île Bourbon, drew up a letter declaring their loyalty

to the revolutionary government and the project of emancipation; and presented it at the Hôtel de Ville, Leconte de Lisle and one other acting as spokesmen.

It was an act of courage, that the poet performed without hesitation, knowing that the consequences for himself would be disastrous. The source of his family's wealth lay in slavery. Hearing of his son's action, his father cut off his allowance, leaving the poet in poverty, to bear the paternal wrath. In later years Leconte de Lisle gladly undertook the support of his mother, though his means were extremely limited, and he found himself obliged in consequence to put himself in a position which was extremely humiliating to a man of his pride: he was obliged to accept help from the Imperial government. In every case we find him sacrificing his personal pride to a sense of duty.

The year 1848 marks the end of the formative period, and the turning point in his life. As a member of the Committee of one of the chief radical clubs in Paris, he volunteered as a delegate to the provinces to spread the revolutionary propaganda in favor of the Republic. The position was not an official one, and was unpaid. The locality chosen was one of the most difficult in France, but the one he knew best—Brittany. Speaking of this region, Renan who was born there, wrote a description in 1849 that shows the difficulties Leconte de Lisle encountered. "The people as a whole," said Renan "could hardly be described as royalist." And yet, the royalist candidates to the assembly were elected by an overwhelming majority.

The bishop draws up the list with the local priests, it is preached from the pulpit, the bourgeois accept it, and it passes without opposition. Alas, it is only too easily explained. It has never been clearer to me, that the intellec-

tual and administrative nullity of the provinces is the chief obstacle to the progress of modern ideas. . . . As for socialism, would you imagine it? There is neither like or dislike, for it is absolutely unknown. . . . The position of the people might be a hundred times worse, and they would accept it as fate; without blaming anyone, or thinking that there might be a possible remedy. . . . Life goes on there in a state of somnolence, and they are indignant with those who come to disturb their indifference and quiet.

In the case of Leconte de Lisle the indignation of the people paralyzed his efforts. The day after his arrival in Dinan, he found the mayor and the clergy, and the guards and firemen assembled in a ceremony—the planting of the Oak of Liberty—a veritable travesty on the libertarian movement. The most reactionary elements in the community were making speeches on "the true liberty, equality and fraternity."

The people were completely in the hands of the priests, as suggested by Renan. One evening as Leconte de Lisle was trying to explain to the people the source of their lack of freedom, the crowd attempted to stone him. It was only with difficulty that he was able to escape. His state of mind at this time is well shown in a letter of the 30th of April, 1848:

It is as clear as daylight that they are trying to nullify the Revolution, and take it out of our hands. The Assembly will be composed of bourgeois and royalists. It will vote downright reactionary laws, and allow the social and political order existing under Louis Philippe to go on indefinitely. . . . How stupid the people are! They are an eternal race of slaves that cannot live without a saddle, or a yoke. Moreover it is not for them that we will go on fighting, but for our sacred ideal.

The reaction has made me an out and out communist.

All this does not prevent me, my friend, from living on the intellectual heights, in serenity, in contemplation of the divine forms of beauty. There is a great tumult in the depths of my brain, but the higher part is unaware of what is contingent and accidental.

This letter is highly characteristic and elucidating. His state of mind just then was similar to that of the hero of Turgeniev's novel, *Virgin Soil,* who is fired with a zeal to better the lot of the peasant serfs, and goes among them preaching the gospel of liberty. Unthinking tools of their oppressive masters, they do not understand; and so they torture him.

The poet came to realize that what was needed was a long work of education. He felt also that the dictatorship of the revolutionary party was necessary until the masses could be educated to the new libertarian system, since the people were so used to being led by the few, that force of habit, and lack of initiative, made them an easy prey to the reactionary political and social machinery.

It is difficult for us to imagine now, how deeply the poet must have been disappointed. 1848 in France was the heroic period of Utopian Socialism. Leconte de Lisle like many others felt that the period of the millennium was at hand. It is true that they realized the difficulties, and yet such was their enthusiasm, and the emotional character of their vision, that the practical means were frequently lost sight of, in the rapt contemplation of the goal. It was a revolution of poets rather than of practical men.

A natural idealist, his ideal filled him with an intense optimism. He saw society reorganized and unified in such a way that all men could be completely developed and happy. His idealism, and consequent optimism,

therefore, is the source of his pessimism. "A pessimist," it has been said, "is a disappointed optimist." It was the frustration of his great social dreams, shattered by the rough contact of reality, that made him seek serenity once more in the ideal realms of art and philosophical contemplation.

There is evidence that he shared in the actual fighting of the June days of 1848; and his revolutionary ideals were never abandoned. Later, we find him writing various works of propaganda, such as his *History of Christianity,* and his *Republican Catechism.* In 1893 he said to M. Amandra "I am an old Jacobin, and nothing makes me smile so much as attacks against the French Revolution, the most admirable fact in history." He felt at this period, however, that the time for the great social revolution was not yet ripe, and that in the meantime in addition to his work of pure propaganda, he could best serve humanity by writing works of pure art.

We are now in a position to understand the so-called pessimism of Leconte de Lisle. It is not a denial of life and beauty, or a philosophical belief in the hopelessness of effort and the necessary predominance of evil. Socialism, and radicalism in general, is fundamentally optimistic. It insists on the evils in society in order that they may be eradicated, with the firm belief that such eradication is possible. It is true that the failure of Utopian Socialism in 1848 shattered his extreme optimism, and made him feel that society was not only full of oppressions and injustices on the part of the dominant classes, but also full of the stupidity and blindness of the oppressed. The cupidity and blindness of the society in which he lived, aroused his anger to such a pitch that at times he was impelled to blaspheme

his god—Humanity; and to see in Death the only immediate liberator. Still he did not despair of "leading mankind back to Eden" or forward to freedom, as is shown by his active propaganda, and by his sentiments expressed in his seventy-fifth year in regard to the Revolution.

He ceased to believe in a Utopia, in a millennium, and yet he believed that the fight was well worth while. For his part, he could help most effectively, by recreating an ideal environment, a world of beauty, in which a certain perfection might be attainable.

"Don't tell me," he wrote to a friend in 1849, "that the struggle between the moral principles in which we both believe, and the social iniquities of our times is just beginning. It was begun many centuries ago and will go on until the day when this globe will disappear in dust throughout space. But there is more than one way of taking part in it." . . . Men are different, he says, "Let each help according to his talents" . . . "the great works of art have a different weight in the balance, than five hundred million social and democratic almanacs."

He realized that propaganda and art do not mix: that the one is a means to an end, while the other is an end in itself. If the latter is beautiful, will it not be of the greatest value to mankind?

"Come now!" he continues further on. "The day when you will have made a beautiful work of art, you will have done more to prove your love of justice and right, than in writing 20 volumes of political economy."

"Let us give our lives for our political and social ideas; well, and good; but let us not sacrifice our intelligence, which is far more valuable than life or death, for it is thanks to it that we shall shake from our feet the dust of

this miserable earth and its passions, for the splendors of spiritual life. So be it!"

The poet had been shocked at the deplorable lack of interest in art on the part of his collaborators on the *Démocratie Pacifique* and the *Phalange*. He had been shocked at the loss to poetry, through Lamartine's abandonment of verse for politics. He was frightened for fear his friend Louis Ménard would sacrifice his creative intelligence and vitiate his art by mixing it with propaganda. From that time on, he resolved that his main endeavor should be the cultivation of his art.

Beginning with 1848 the period of formation is past. The principal tendencies, the great inner forces are established. It remains to study their adaptation to the main currents of his times.

CHAPTER II

THE CONTEMPORARY BACKGROUND

In the course of his life, from 1818 to 1894, Leconte de Lisle witnessed the rapid changes of the nineteenth century which transformed the world: the evolution of science, the industrial revolution and the rise of democracy. These changes, profound as they were, had a powerful effect on literature.

The seventeenth century literary ideal, like the social and economic system of that time was aristocratic, selective, and restrictive. Within narrow, prescribed limits there was harmony between the writer and society —the only "society that counted," that of Paris and Versailles. Classical literature was highly social in this restricted sense.

The Romanticism of the first half of the nineteenth century was the direct outcome of the Revolution. Negatively it was the revolt of the individual writer against the critical restraint and discipline of Classicism; positively it was the expression of the emotions of those individual writers.

New worlds were suddenly disclosed, within and without, above and below: the fevered longings of a René, the realms of nature, the supernatural, and the grotesque. Everything, even the commonplace, took on a new significance and aroused wonder, as things *seen* and *felt* for the first time always do. But above all, stress must be laid on the fact that romanticism was the revolt of the individual, socially, politically, metaphysically, and

artistically. The philosophers, from Berkeley to Kant, Fichte, and Schelling ceased to be active social agents, as Diderot and Voltaire had been in the eighteenth century, and proceeded to create a dream universe.

According to these romantic or idealistic metaphysicians, nothing is real except thought. The outer world is simply a projection of one's inner consciousness.

Gradually, however, the center of gravity shifted from the individual to the group, from the subjective to the objective, from the world of fancy to that of reality.

The year 1843 is a convenient date by which to mark the change. The romantic plays of Victor Hugo had won the favor of the public since the success of *Hernani* in 1830, but the tide turned in 1843 with the failure of *Les Burgraves* with its fantastic vision of the Middle Ages, and its lyric rhapsodies. The same year witnessed the success of the neo-classical drama *Lucrèce,* by Ponsard, who inaugurates the Common-sense school, which becomes more and more objective, and prosaic as time goes on and culminates in the bourgeois dramas of Augier and the younger Dumas.

The novel, naturally more objective, had already shown the new tendency toward impersonal observation, with Balzac. Those by Chateaubriand, *Graziella* by Lamartine, and the early romantic novels of George Sand had been largely autobiographical. Balzac's aim, on the other hand, was to present a study of society with all its varied types, much as the zoologist observes and describes the varied species of animal life. In a word, introspection was replaced by observation, the individual gave way to society.

The complete evolution is easily observed in the writings of George Sand. From 1840 to 1847, having ceased

to pour forth torrents of personal feeling, she dedicated herself to the socialistic and humanitarian novel. In 1846 she began her series of studies of peasant life, with *La Mare au Diable.* Although it is common to speak of these novels as idealistic, they present an objective vision of reality, which is as free from personal bias, as the works of the later realists and naturalists.

The changes at work are no less apparent in intellectual circles. In politics the new movement was reflected by the rise of socialism, still somewhat subjective, "utopian socialism" as it is generally called in contrast to the later "scientific socialism" which soon replaced it, and is based on material facts, rather than on dreams of the future. In philosophy the new period was inaugurated by the positivist philosophy of Comte, banishing speculation and installing science in its place. Naturally enough with the dethronement of individual sentiments, romantic religiosity was swept aside. Religion became an objective reality to be studied by science or used as artistic material. Criticism itself became a science, and the criticism of Sainte-Beuve, concerned for the most part with a study of individualities, was supplanted by the more objective criticism of Taine, which explained a literary work largely in terms of environment.

Science which had been struggling alone since the Renaissance, and gathering tremendous force in the eighteenth century in the face of great opposition, at last came into its own.

Practical application of science to industry revolutionized the latter, which in turn completely changed the whole structure of society. The introduction of machinery, with the attendant factory system, raised the bourgeoisie to a position of wealth and power, and re-

duced the worker to dependence and poverty. Those of the nobility who had money became part of the capitalist class and were absorbed by it. Louis Philippe, who ascended the throne in 1830, was known as "The Bourgeois King." The Revolution of the Workers and Intellectuals in 1848, who hoped to gain a share in the means of production, was a hopeless failure as far as attainment of ends was concerned. The socialists were crushed. The Coup d'État of Napoleon III, who posed as a friend of workers and clericals alike, put the Bourgeoisie more firmly in the saddle than ever; for once he was in power, it was to the latter that he catered almost exclusively. The cry of "Get rich!" which had been the slogan in the days of Louis Philippe, did not change during the Second Empire, unless possibly to the cry of "Get richer!"

Society had ceased to be organic. There were no common ideals, political, economic, religious, and artistic uniting society, as there had been to a large extent during the seventeenth century in France, or during the period that built the great Gothic cathedrals and produced Dante; or to a greater extent, in Athens, at the time of Pericles. From 1850 on, the bourgeoisie were interested in business affairs. A class of politicians sprang up interested merely in politics. The artists confined their interests to art; and few save the clericals and monarchists were particularly interested in religion.

Shortly before 1848 many of the writers had joined with the leaders of the proletariat in a last effort to unite society. Leconte de Lisle and George Sand and many others became socialists. Not only Lamartine and Hugo, as is well known, entered the field of politics, but also de Vigny and Dumas. The introduction of Baudelaire's book on the Salon of 1846, is thus addressed,

"to the Bourgeois." "You are the majority—numbers and intelligence;—therefore you stand for power and justice."

With the failure of the revolution of '48, and the subsequent Coup d'État, the hopelessness of the situation was keenly felt. The cause of the people was, for the time being at least, completely lost, and with it the cause of the liberal artists and poets who had hoped to make art an integral force in society. The reign of the "tired business man" had begun. To such pleadings as those of Baudelaire, just cited, the Bourgeois turned a deaf ear. There was nothing left for the artist to do but flatter the vulgar taste of the bourgeoisie, or withdraw within his own circle and cultivate his art. This was scarcely possible in the field of the drama, but in the novel, and in the field of speculative thought, in poetry, it became the dominating tendency, and thus "art for art" became the watchword during the Second Empire. Victor Hugo still clung to the idea of the poet's mission in society, but he was in exile.

The consequence of the industrial revolution, and the subsequent failure of the political revolution to socialize industry were inevitable. The resultant social disintegration was a fact to be faced. Unfortunate for humanity, it was necessarily unfortunate for art, since any human activity that sets up housekeeping for itself and becomes "private" and detached must suffer.

Under the circumstances, however, it is fortunate that a large group of writers refused to commercialize their talents, and clung to their artistic ideals. Though their work may have suffered from the point of view of universality, the best of it will always be a source of joy to the cultured.

The aims and achievements of the literary artists who, apart from Hugo, dominate the period from 1850 to 1870, roughly speaking, and whose slogan was *"L'art pour l'art"* have seldom been properly understood. "Art for art's sake" as interpreted by its enemies is a meaningless phrase. What its authors meant by it is that the Fine Arts, as contrasted with the Useful Arts, are an end in themselves, rather than a means to an end. Art is a goal in which we rest, rather than a road leading to some other goal. In a certain sense it is complete in itself. A beautiful picture gives us a certain kind of joy; that is all we ask of it. A hammer on the other hand is nothing apart from the use to which it is put, it is a means, rather than an end. This does not mean that the Fine Arts, any more than the Useful Arts are independent of life, of humanity. In so far as the *goal* of life is living, life itself may be a Fine Art. A work of art is complete in itself only in regard to other activities. It goes without saying that it is nothing apart from humanity. In fact, art is the supreme good of humanity, the final goal of all activity.

This brings us to the relation of art to ethics and truth. Rightly, the advocates of *"L'art pour l'art"* maintained a sharp distinction. Morality is simply an instrument, a means by which society controls its actions. It relates to conduct, and is always forward looking, as affecting some other activity. The same applies also to truth, which is likewise, an instrument, a utility. However since truth is the supreme utility it is necessarily something with which mankind is in close harmony, and is often a large element in the formation of a work of art. Truth is like the fire on a hearth: it gives us necessary heat, and in addition it gives us joy as it dances and flickers before our eyes.

It is important to establish these distinctions in order to show that there is no quarrel between art on the one hand, and life, morality, and truth on the other, as far as the believers in *"L'art pour l'art"* were concerned. In a letter to a friend Flaubert wrote:

> Don't read, as children read, to amuse yourself, nor as ambitious people read, to educate yourself. No, read in order *to live.*

Nor is there any necessary antipathy between works of art and lessons in conduct. Leconte de Lisle in fact in an essay on a contemporary poet goes so far as to state: "There is no effective teaching other than in art which has no aim other than itself." It is a paradox, but extremely significant. Take for example the hideous posters of the prohibition societies, contrasting the fates of the abstainer and the non-abstainer: the former surrounded by a circle of happy children, the latter a raving maniac, the prey of delirium tremens. The effect of the lesson is lost by the incomplete and therefore false picture of reality which it presents. On the other hand a novel such as Flaubert's *Mme. Bovary,* written with no purpose other than that of making a great work of art, a true picture of reality replete with life, may incidentally contain a profound lesson.

The moral lessons to be gained from certain works of art are by-products however. The artist who aims at both morality and beauty is liable to attain neither, like the dog in the fable that drops the bone in order to seize the reflection of it in the water. There is also the case of the dramatist, for example, who writes a play to advocate divorce. No sooner are divorce laws granted, than the *raison d'être* of the play disappears, and with it in all probability the play itself.

Whether justified or not, by social conditions and by their own theories, the fact remains that the distinguishing trait of the principal writers in France during the third quarter of the nineteenth century is their cult of beauty, one might almost say, their religion of art.

The romantic writers for the most part, in reacting against the formalism, and the "laws of good taste," of the classicists had rather overshot the mark in treating art with utter lack of ceremony. They affected a certain carelessness in their writing, which is often, as in the case of Musset, the result of youthful buoyancy and a desire to mystify the long-faced pedants of the old school. As such it is amusing and refreshing.

When it is a result of laziness, ignorance, or a lack of sincere love for the writer's art, it ceases to be a merit, or even "a prerogative of genius."

Lamartine, great poet though he was, not only half abandoned poetry early in his career, but looked upon it as a mere incident in his life. It had simply been a means of relieving his feelings. As he said himself:

> I was not an author, I was what in these days is called an amateur, . . . a connaisseur of literature. . . . Poetry was not my profession; it was an accident, a happy adventure, a piece of good fortune in my life. I aspired to other things, I prepared myself for other work.

Gifted with a remarkable facility for versification, he improvised too brilliantly to feel called to go over his work and patiently correct the careless mistakes in language, the monotonous repetitions, and the prosaic passages. In his essay on Lamartine Leconte de Lisle voiced the opinion of most of the writers of the next generation.

What did he lack to become an exceptionally great poet, the

equal of the greatest? He lacked love of art and religious respect for it. He is the most fertile, the most eloquent, the most lyric, the most extraordinary poetic amateur of the nineteenth century; but an ardent inclination, a strong desire for beauty are not equivalent to an absolute, supreme passion for it, and no one can master Poetry, unless she masters him exclusively.

Except perhaps for Greece, no country, not even Italy, has shown more conscious love and respect for art than France, and at no time in French history has this love and respect been more manifest than at the time of which I write.

The case of Flaubert is typical. A skeptic in matters of religion, he states:

I am leaning towards a sort of esthetic mysticism (if the two words can be used together), and I only wish that it were stronger. When no encouragement comes from others, when the outer world is disgusting, enervating, corrupting and stulifying, people of integrity and delicacy of sentiment are forced to seek somewhere within themselves a more fitting place, in which to live. If society continues as it is doing, we shall see, I believe, mystics such as have existed in every period of gloom. Unable to expand, the soul will concentrate within itself.

According to Baudelaire it was Théophile Gautier who launched the movement with his *Mlle. de Maupin.*

This novel, this story, this picture or prolonged painter's revery, this sort of hymn to Beauty had above all the result of establishing the living source and spirit of works of art, that is to say the exclusive love of Beauty.

The devotion of Baudelaire to this new ideal is well known. His *Hymn to Beauty* is one of his most widely known and most characteristic poems.

Renan, who may be considered the thinker of the group, throws aside his reserve and exclaims in *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse:*

> I understood it only vaguely, and still I partially perceived that beauty is so high a gift; that talent, genius and even virtue are nothing in comparison.

Similar conditions bred similar results in England, and we have Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites stressing the importance of art and beauty, and later Swinburne, Symonds, Pater, and Oscar Wilde, making a veritable religion of Art, and withdrawing more and more from contemporary bourgeois society and seeking inspiration in the kindred arts, or in the remote in time and place.

In America, Poe had already broken with the prevailing standards and tastes and made artistic excellence the sole criterion of both prose and poetry. Later when the French school of literary art was at its height there appeared in Cincinnati, Ohio, another voice crying in the wilderness, that of Lafcadio Hearn, who had received his artistic impulse largely from the writings of Gautier and Flaubert whom he was translating. Finally, in a broader and less exclusive way, we find an intense love of beauty akin to worship in the writings of George Woodberry.

In France especially, the religion of Beauty grew up partly to fill the void left by the decline of the church. The romantic period was filled with vague religious tendencies, and above all with boundless optimism, as voiced by Lamartine:

> Tout est bien, tout est bon, tout est grand à sa place

Nature had been exalted in purely subjective fashion

without clearly defining what was meant. We are familiar with this nature mysticism in the poems of Wordsworth, who derived it largely from Rousseau.

If by nature we mean the world unmodified by man's efforts, we must admit that life is in the main a struggle against it, in which the useful arts equip us with the means of bringing nature more in harmony with human nature, providing us with armor and weapons, so to speak; while the fine arts form a substitute for nature, an environment fully adapted to humanity and complete in itself. It was this which led Baudelaire to the opposite extreme, and caused him to proclaim the superiority of the artificial over the natural.

Romantic religiosity, founded on purely individual emotion and a vague belief in the "goodness of nature," received a rude blow at the hands of Science, which dominated the succeeding generation. The true character of our environment was revealed by an objective study of its processes. Instead of the kindly Mother, ready to heal all wounds, we have a conception of nature "red in tooth and claw." Romantic optimism gave way to a reign of pessimism that was almost universal.

Pessimism, "*Le Mal du Siècle*," "*Weltschmerz*" is by no means confined to this period, nor can its causes be traced to any one set of facts. In general one may say that it is due to one's being forced to relinquish his dreams. It had already made its appearance among the early romanticists. With Musset it was caused by the failure to find happiness in life through abandoning himself to passion, an act idealized and exalted by the romanticists. With Baudelaire too, it was partly personal. With a complex nature and a streak of abnormality, he loved goodness, but was fascinated by evil.

Unfortunately too, in his love of beauty and his reaction against nature he at times confused it with human nature; and one cannot run counter to the latter with impunity. Baudelaire's remorse was at times as terrible as it was sincere. With Flaubert, as with the other literary artists of his time, the ideal of artistic perfection, placed at an impossible height, was a source of constant disillusionment and depression. Writers whose ideal was simply to sell their talent, or please the vulgar tastes of the crowd, might be happy, but these Don Quixotes of art consumed their lives and their happiness gazing upward on the dazzling sun of their ideal, as Baudelaire expresses it in his *Plaintes d'un Icare.* Like Icarus, they soared too high; the wings of their inspiration melted in the flames of beauty, and they fell.

Les amants des prostituées
Sont heureux, dispos et repus;
Quant à moi, mes bras sont rompus
Pour avoir étreint des nuées.
C'est grâce aux astres non pareils,
Qui tout au fond du ciel flamboient,
Que mes yeux consumés ne voient
Que des souvenirs de soleils.

There were moments when Flaubert wept with joy, at having given adequate expression to his thought and feeling. But the moments of depression, when he sought in vain to attain the high standard he had set himself, were far more frequent.

Leconte de Lisle likewise knew the "anguish of perfection," but as I have already indicated, he suffered chiefly for social reasons: the cruelty to slaves which he had witnessed in his youth, the misery of the "wage-slaves," the indifference of society to beauty, and above

all the failure of his humanitarian ideal, when the revolution of 1848 proved unsuccessful.

For a period in his youth Leconte de Lisle, as we know, had become imbued with the optimistic religious ideal of romanticism. A more objective view of life swept it away as he grew older. He came in fact to be the most bitter enemy of the Church in French literature since Voltaire. In later years he wrote: the church "... condemns thought, annihilates reason. It denies, and combats all the truths gained by science." He felt that it had been responsible for untold misery. And yet religion was a mental and spiritual crutch, without which it was difficult for him to walk. Almost everyone has gone through the crisis, at one time or another, but with Leconte de Lisle the longing to believe in spite of the impossibility of doing so was a continual source of torment.

When he could no longer believe in the friendliness of Nature, or in his Cult of Man, the earth became a sort of inferno to his sensitive spirit. But like Dante's Farinati, he seems to tower above it all "as though he scorned all Hell."

> Ed ei s'ergea col petto e colla fronte
> Come avesse l'Inferno in gran dispetto.

Leconte de Lisle rises above his sufferings, and gazes on the sources of human misery with a steadfast look—the incarnation of spiritual stoicism.

In his book on the *Greek Poets,* J. A. Symonds tells us that it is not for nothing that Christianity had been molding the lives of men for centuries. In spite of ourselves, we lift up our eyes to the skies with restless yearning. The modern soul is afflicted with the malady of *l'amour de l'impossible,* as exemplified in Faust.

"Nor has the advent of science restored our mind to that 'passionless Bride, divine Tranquillity.'" In fact science seemed to make things worse by proving to man that "his most cherished hypotheses are mere illusions."

As suggested by Symonds, the cure lay however in the hands of science itself. It was only by facing the facts, hard as they were, that man could hope to improve his condition. With the destruction of hope in "the other world" and of belief in benign Nature, to whom one only had to "return" in order to shake off the evils of the world, there was nothing left but to learn the true character of objective reality and mold it to suit human needs, by the aid of science, or replace it by an ideal reality, with the aid of art. Thus alongside the cult of art grew up the cult of science.

Weltschmerz was a necessary stage. Before progress can be realized, the intellectual leaders must be thoroughly awakened to the existence of evil.

Art as well as progress was the gainer. As Musset sang:

> Les plus désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux,
> Et j'en sais d'immortels qui sont de purs sanglots.

Pessimism was reflected both in literary philosophy such as that of Schopenhauer, and in philosophical literature, such as the poetry of Alfred de Vigny, of Leconte de Lisle, of Sully-Prudhomme with is hopeful pessimism, of the great Italian poet, Leopardi, with its note of proud despair.

The philosophical trend was foreshadowed in a book, which we have already noted as having had considerable influence on Leconte de Lisle, *Les Sept Cordes de la Lyre,* by George Sand, in which she says: ". . . just as a great poet holds the future of philosophy in his

grasp, a great philosopher holds in his power the future of poetry."

The cult of science, which reached its height in the post-romantic period, still continues, but with less of the mystic intensity than it had in the time of Leconte de Lisle. Science has had its gods, its apostles, and even its martyrs. Sacha Guitry's play *Pasteur* admirably reflects the student's worship of the great scientist:

> "*Fifth Student.*—You believe in God then?
> "*First Student.*—No, but I believe in him! . . ."

Renan in *L'Avenir de la science* preaches the new cult with all the exaltation of a disciple. Walter James Dodd, the X-ray expert, to select a recent example, gave his life for the cause of scientific investigation with a courage like that of the early martyrs.

History, too, became imbued with the new spirit of science. To quote from Lanson:

> Thierry was satisfied with taking the races of mankind into account. Michelet felt that one must give the races a good solid base, the earth which sustains and nourishes them.

Michelet is a typical figure of the period. His psychological reactions were similar to those of Leconte de Lisle. The chief motives in his life were his Humanitarianism, his condemnation of the Church and the bourgeoisie, his interest in the past and in natural science, as shown in such works as: *Birds, Insects, Mountains,* and *The Sea,* which are filled with scientific facts, and overflows with poetry.

In his *Correspondance* Flaubert wrote: "History and natural history! There you have the two muses of the modern age. . . . Let us not return to the Mid-

dle Ages. *Let us observe,* it is all important; there is the secret!''

While still in college at Rennes, Leconte de Lisle wrote to his friend Rouffet telling with enthusiasm of scientific works that he had been reading; and suggested in boyish fashion that they mingle science with their verses.

Science appealed to the literary artists of the time for various reasons. Although the chief aim of *science* is utility, the immediate aim of the *scientist* is usually knowledge for its own sake. Most of the great scientific discoveries, even those which have been of the greatest utility, were made simply for the sake of knowing some phenomenon. In this respect the scientist is primarily disinterested, like the artist. It is a fact also that there have been scientists who are pure esthetes, disgusted by attempts to put their discoveries to use. Science, however, cannot hope to rival art on its own ground. Its usefulness is its chief justification. Science and art should be distinct. *''Science,''* said Leconte de Lisle, *''is the means, of which art is the end.''*

Thus science became an aid to art, with archeology, anthropology, philology, and most of all history, which through its researches enables the artist accurately to reconstruct the past. The *Moses* of Alfred de Vigny recalls in no wise ''the sacerdotal and autocratic chief of six thousand fierce nomads wandering over the Sinai desert convinced of the sacredness of his mission and of the legitimacy of the implacable punishments which he inflicts,'' wrote Leconte de Lisle in an article on de Vigny. On the other hand, thanks to innumerable documents and studies, and to his trips to Africa, as well as to his power of imagination, Flaubert was able in *Salammbô* to evoke convincingly the ancient life of

Carthage, as vividly as the familiar scenes of a village in Normandy.

Another chief characteristic of the literary art of the period, was love of the exotic—the strange and unfamiliar. It was a result of the general widening of the field of art, which began with the earliest romanticists; but apart from Chateaubriand it was cultivated with greater success, and with more sincerity, and intensity by the later writers. The Orient of Hugo's *Orientales* is not only false but quite external, mere decoration. To write poems on the Orient without any more knowledge of it than that possessed by Hugo, was, to paraphrase an expression of Louis Bouilhet, like making lobster salad without any lobster.

The reason why Leconte de Lisle and his generation showed such enthusiasm for the far-away in time and space, need hardly be reiterated. In love with both objective reality and the ideal, ill at ease in the atmosphere of industrialism at home, their imaginations wandered to other climes and other ages, but insisted on *real* evocation of them.

Shortly before, the famous orientalist, Eugène Burnouf, of whose "superiority in science and critical acumen" Renan speaks with enthusiasm in his *Memories of Childhood and Youth,* and various other scientists, had begun to reveal Hinduism and the true Greece. From a mass of facts, men like Gaston Boissier, Fustel de Coulanges, and Renan extracted the essential life of the ancients, of the Romans, Greeks and Hebrews, their daily life, their environment and especially their inner life, as embodied in their religious institutions, studied objectively without a religious bias.

One of the most interesting savants of the period was Louis Ménard, the friend of Leconte de Lisle, a chemist,

revolutionist, Hellenist and poet, author of *Reveries of a Mystic Pagan.*

The Middle Ages had charmed the romantic poets, partly because a relative lack of definite knowledge concerning this period gave free reign to fancy. Also, Greece was associated with the classics, and the classicist dogmas of common sense and literary authority. Even so, Musset had declared Greece "mother of the arts;" and Théophile Gautier, in the midst of romantic exuberance, had vigorously defended the beauty of Greek art in his novel, *Mlle de Maupin.*

At every critical period in French literature since Ronsard, writers have drunk fresh life and inspiration from classic sources. Even the symbolists such as Samain and Henri de Régnier have acknowledged allegiance to the Ancients.

Strangely enough, the Classicists did not really know Greece and confined themselves to *copying* the Ancients. Except for a few of Ronsard's poems, the spirit was lacking. That the ancient Romans of Corneille's and Racine's plays should have appeared on the stage in seventeenth century wigs may be taken as a symbol.

. It is significant that the chief poets to succeed the romanticists should have been called Parnassians. The Greek worship of beauty appealed to them above all. They could well sympathize with the old men on the wall of Troy, who after gazing on Helen's beauty, understood why such a terrible war had been fought. Speaking of the legend that Stesichorus was smitten blind for blaming Helen in his *Fall of Troy,* Symonds writes:

> To assail Helen with reproach was not less dangerous than to touch the Ark of the Covenant, for with the Greeks beauty was a holy thing.

The remoteness of antiquity from every day life made it good material for the artist. Familiarity dulls our intuition of the things about us, as Bergson has pointed out. We are too accustomed to regarding them in a utilitarian light. In his "Essay on the Useful and the Beautiful," Herbert Spencer concludes that what is far-away can hardly be made useful, and for that reason artists do well to take their subjects from ancient times.

There is great beauty in Christian mythology, as Dante and Milton have shown. It lacks however the variety and plastic beauty of Greek mythology, and the color of Hindu mythology, which rivals that of Christianity in its ability to stir the somber emotions of horror, and outdoes it in expression of serenity and of philosophic beauty. It is not surprising that the field of Hinduism, newly revealed by Burnouf and other orientalists, should have attracted our poet, born in the Indian Ocean, and interested in the Hindus whom he saw in his childhood on the Isle of Bourbon.

In our own country, Lafcadio Hearn had seen artistic possibilities in Buddhism, and in the luxuriance of the tropics, the color, and above all the artistry of the East. If the cult of beauty was a ruling motive in ancient Greece, it still is so in the Orient. There is something puritanical about Mohammedan art and religion which banishes the representation of the human figure, but the decorative arts have gained by it, and the general attitude of the people is distinctly contemplative and esthetic, as contrasted with our Western utilitarianism, our

> Endless, restless motion
> Of squirrels in a cage.

No wonder the artists of the period should have turned

to the colorful, contemplative East to forget the dull drab of their surroundings. The Goncourts, for example, who felt it was their duty to be modern, but who could only see the ugly sides of modern life and whose work in consequence suffered, found a subject suited to their rare gifts in the interpretation of Japanese art. It was Greece that was the chief source of inspiration. The world was out of joint. To Greece they looked as the land of divine harmony. Nothing gives a better insight into the spirit of the times, than Renan's beautiful *Prayer on the Acropolis.* I only wish that I might quote it in its entirety.

Oh nobleness, oh true and simple beauty, goddess whose cult is reason and wisdom, thou whose temple is an eternal lesson in sincerity and integrity, I am late in coming to the threshold of thy mysteries; I come to thy altar with intense remorse. It was only after infinite quest that I was enabled to find thee. . . .

If thou only knewest how hard it has become to serve thee! All nobleness has disappeared. The Scythians have conquered the world. There is no longer a republic of free men. . . . A fearful *Panboetia,* a league of every sort of folly, has covered the world with a leaden lid, under which we stifle. . . .

I wrote according to certain rules you love, oh Theogony, the life of the young god whom I served in my childhood; they called me Euhemerus; they write and ask me what was my intention; they do not care for any thing other than that which serves to enrich the tables on which they count their gains. And why should one write the lives of the gods, except to make people love what was divine in them, and to show that the divine spark is still alive, and will live eternally in the heart of man?

Suggesting that Christ himself has been misunder-

stood by his own followers, Renan affirms that "for a thousand years the world has been a desert, where no flowers bloomed. During that time, thou wert silent, oh *Salpinx,* Clarion of thought! . . ."

Referring to Pallas Athene, goddess of wisdom, he says:

The world will only be saved by casting off its bonds of barbarism.

Firm in thee, I shall resist my fatal counsellors; my scepticism, my doubt in man, my restlessness of soul, which, when the truth is found, makes me continue to seek it. . . .

Thou art true, perfect; thy marble is stainless; but the temple of Hagia-Sophia in Byzantium, also produces a divine effect with its bricks and its plaster. It is the image of heaven's vault. It will fall; but if thy *cella* were large enough to hold a crowd, it too would fall.

A mighty wave of oblivion draws us into a nameless gulf. Oh abyss, thou art the only God. The tears of every race are true tears; the dreams of all the sages contain a measure of truth. Everything on earth is but a symbol and a dream. The gods depart as well as men; it is better thus, that they should not be eternal. The Faith that one has held should never be a chain. One's task is done, when one has wrapped his longings in the purple shroud in which the dead gods sleep.

CHAPTER III

THE QUESTION OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

THE untrammeled expression of the individual had been the essence of romanticism. It had done for literature what the Great Revolution had done for man. Lyric poetry had been the undisputed gainer, yet the resultant literary anarchy brought about certain abuses; the hypertrophy of the ego, a feverish personalism, and lack of reverence for beauty, which put the following generation on its guard, and caused it to react with the principle of *impersonal art*.

George Sand herself, who had been perhaps the most distinguished culprit, suddenly reformed, and early in her career, while Leconte de Lisle was still a youth, and still under the "romantic spell," she has one of her characters say in *Les Sept Cordes de la Lyre:*

> All these feverish outpourings, all these delirious metaphors constitute a purely physical malady . . . during which man's brain can produce no work of beauty. I understand and respect poetry; but I do not approve of it except as a clear and luminous form, destined to proclaim the austere truths of science, . . . of philosophy in a word.

This is an extreme statement, but shows in a general way the new attitude.

Passion is the inner kernel of poetry, but even in lyric poetry it may defeat its own purposes. Musset felt this when he wrote the *Nuit de Mai:*

> L'homme n'écrit rien sur le sable
> A l'heure où passe l'aquilon.

This was Diderot's idea too, in the *Paradox of the Actor.* One must be extremely sensitive, and have felt deeply, to be an artist; but to reproduce those same sensations and emotions the brain must be clear, and the imagination vigorous, as it cannot be when one is dominated by strong feeling.

The impassibility of which Leconte de Lisle so often speaks, is partly a result of his struggle with his hypersensitiveness. The poet must attain a certain serenity before he can render the passion with sufficient definiteness of form to make it possible for the reader to follow him. If the latter's mind is confused, the passion will never reach his heart. It is a paradox, and therefore human; for man is not all of one piece—like a triangle, or a glass of water.

More important still, was the reaction against the injection of one's ego into art. Great works are often the work of many minds: *The Odyssey,* the *Bible,* Shakspere's works and *Faust.* In art as in life, man cannot stand alone. If the imagination of the author is not greater than the author himself, truly the man must be monstrously grand, or his imagination exceedingly limited. As pointed out by George Woodberry, in speaking of the lyrics of the Greek Anthology, there is a certain advantage in their relative anonymity. They are like the sea and the winds. They belong to no one individual, to no one country or race, to no one period, but to all men, of all time.

In his interesting letters, Flaubert expressed the attitude of his generation.

> The artist should be in his work, like God in the midst of his creation, invisible and all powerful, felt at every moment but never seen.

A work of art is not the proper place for a person to express his personal opinions. Opinions necessarily change with rapidity, while art should be for all time. Again Flaubert wrote:

> There are a lot of things that are choking me, and that I should like to spit out, but swallow again. What is the use of saying them, after all! Almost anyone is more *general* and consequently typical.

There was another reason why Leconte de Lisle felt a strong repugnance for putting his personality into his poems. There is a certain indelicacy in taking the crowd into one's innermost confidence. The beauty of D'Annunzio's novel *The Flame of Life,* is marred for many by the repugnance aroused by his indiscretion in writing the book. It may be that the artist has no right to sanctity of person, but at this period especially the poets, shrinking from the general vulgarity of society, were all the more reluctant to show their naked souls. In his poem, *Les Montreurs,* Leconte de Lisle has admirably expressed this attitude.

> Let him who will, display his heartwrung cries,
> Within thy market place, O savage crowd,
> To light with sterile fire thy stupid eyes,
> And beg thy pity or thy laughter loud . . .
> I will not sell thee my wild joy, my wound.

Marius-Ary Leblond has a further explanation of Leconte de Lisle's impersonalism:

> The very impersonalism of his poetry, which was attributed to majestic pride, was again merely socialism.

This is true in the sense that his inspiration is collective like Shakspere's or Goethe's, and that his chief sources

are the dreams dreamed by many men, forging beauty in myth and legend.

No lyric poet can eliminate the expression of his personal emotions. He can hide his private life, and his private opinions, but not his feelings; and Leconte de Lisle is no exception. Critics with little feeling themselves, who have paid more heed to his doctrines of impersonality and impassibility than to his poetry have fallen into the trap and declared that Leconte de Lisle was not a poet. *Les Montreurs* itself is permeated with intense feeling and sensitiveness, all the stronger for having been restrained.

One of the chief methods of expression of our poet is that of describing nature. "A landscape is a mood." As Byron said:

> "High mountains are to me a feeling."

The deep emotions aroused in Wordsworth by nature, were attributed by him to some mystic cause. In reality nature was merely objectifying, reflecting his own moods. Nature is a mirror. Sometimes pictorial descriptions simply act as a foil, contrasting with, and heightening the poet's feelings, as in Burns's *Bonnie Doon:*

> Ye flowery banks o' bonie Doon,
> How can ye blume sae fair?

The poets use landscape to objectify their emotions, but they use it also as the painter uses it, to delight the senses. The romantic poets had inspired the painters; the neo-romanticists were often inspired by the painters. Modern painting was at its height in France, during this period. At no time since the Venetian school had painting been so colorful; and at no time before had it ob-

tained such marvelous light effects. Gautier, Fromentin, and the Goncourt brothers were painters as well as writers; as was Louis Ménard, the chief friend and inspirer of Leconte de Lisle.

Painting and sculpture, being by their very nature less accessible to the bourgeois and less capable of being vulgarized and put to utilitarian and moralizing service, had kept themselves in their purity. These arts influenced Leconte de Lisle in still a further manner. They presented material already beautified by passing through the creative imagination of the artist or the sculptor.

Music was at this time being influenced by literature, and here too, as with painting, the influence was reciprocal. Berlioz, whose veneration for the great poets was nearly as great as for the great masters of music, was writing program music. Wagner, who was a poet as well as great musician, was blending the arts into a single art, the music drama.

A great deal has been said about "the confusion of the arts." One should not forget that literature, especially poetry, is and always has been a blending of the fine arts. To quote Théodore de Banville, who is in a sense the theorizer of the group with his *Petit Traité de la poésie française:*

> Poetry is at once music, statuary, painting, and eloquence; it should charm the ear, enchant the mind, represent sounds, imitate colors, render objects visible, and arouse in us the emotions it is pleased to reproduce; moreover it is the only art which is complete, inevitable, and which contains all the others. . . .

There have been poets, like Gautier who have emphasized the pictorial side, at the expense of the other phases perhaps; or like Verlaine, who has emphasized the musical phase, in his *Art Poétique:*

De la musique avant toute chose . . .

Some of the latter's theories, however, tended to destroy the chief means of attaining musicalness. Many of Verlaine's followers, lacking his exquisitely attuned ear, lost the very thing they were striving hardest to attain.

I doubt if there is a more musical poem in the French language than Leconte de Lisle's *La Vérandah*. Let us see how his music is obtained. French prosody is always a stumbling block to the foreigner. The lack of strong stress on the syllables necessitates an entirely different system of versification from that found in other languages, especially English. First, let us understand the basic principles, which I do not think have ever been clearly understood either by the poets themselves, or by theorists of French versification.

The basis of prosody is the same as that of all the decorative, or non-representative arts: namely, the old familiar principle of "repetition with variation." A symphony is primarily that: much repetition with wide variation of sounds and combination of sounds, with a minimum of representation, or imitation of the outer world. This in itself is sufficient to arouse any shade of emotion. Japanese prints, especially landscapes, while largely representative, combine an extraordinary amount of repetition of certain lines, or patterns, and colors cunningly varied. Poetry too, contains both elements. Prose also, may embody a great amount of "repetition with variation," and thus be musical.

The chief element of repetition in prose is the "phrasal length," or interval of pause. In French, even more than in English, one runs a group of words together, then pauses, another group of words, and pauses. These groups or sections of a uniform or approximately uni-

form length divided by pauses give the desired repetition, or rhythm. In ordinary speech the sections are of such irregularity of length that there is no pattern, no music. If you average the number of syllables in French "phrasal sections," you will find that it is about five or six. It is largely a matter of ease in breathing. For this reason French poetry unconsciously adopted as the basis of its versification the six syllable group followed by a rest. There is another element also. The section is marked off not only by a rest, but by a change in the pitch of the voice, usually a rising inflection. Wide inflection is one of the characteristic features of French speech, and the repetition of a rising or falling inflection at regular intervals in poetry gives an added element of design, or music. A third element is accent, or stress, the basis of English prosody. Now, if a given number of syllables is marked off not only by a pause, a change in pitch, and a stress, but by a similarity in sound of the final syllables, we have the chief elements of music in French prosody; and if the sections consist of the number of syllables that best coincides with breathing, we have the classic French *alexandrin*.

Innovators have claimed that it lacked variety. As a matter of fact it is less "regular" and, therefore, less monotonous than almost any of the English forms of versification for example, in which the regular beat of loud and soft stress easily produces a sing-song effect. Even the "regular" *alexandrin* of Racine and Corneille may be recited on the stage in such a manner that the listener is scarcely aware of the fact that it is verse at all. French being weakly stressed cannot afford to do without the other elements of repetition: more or less regularity in length of sections, and rhyme.

Leconte de Lisle probably carried the principle of irregularity of phrasal lengths as far as it can safely be carried in French metrics and still maintain a large amount of musicalness.

In addition to the rhythm of phrasal sections and rhyme, there are other elements of repetition with variation. The poet may repeat entire lines, slightly varying them. Leconte de Lisle was by no means the first to use this effect, but no French poet has surpassed him in ability to use it tellingly. Observe for example *Dans le Ciel Clair, La Vérandah,* or more particularly *Pantouns Malais,* where it might easily have become monotonous, but is in reality a source of power. Similar to this principle, is the repetition of stanzas, or the chorus.

Another sort of varied repetition might be called "logical rhythm," or parallelism. This is one of the chief sources of music in the Bible.

> Jehovah, rebuke me not in thine anger,
> Neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.

Instead of the same idea being repeated, it may be contrasted with an opposite idea.

> A soft answer turneth away wrath,
> But a grievous word bringeth up anger.

Similarly, the repetition of grammatical constructions may be a source of rhythm. There are any number of ways in which the basic principle of the non-representative arts may be carried out, and Leconte de Lisle has used an unusual variety of them. Let me give a few examples of parallelism:

> Les jasmins de Mossoul, les fleurs de l'oranger
> Ont un parfum moins frais, ont une odeur moins douce . . .
> *Les Roses d'Ispahan.*

In the next example the ideas are contrasted, just as in music the theme is often inverted.

> Si la Félicité de ce vain monde est brève,
> Si le jour de l'angoisse est un siècle sans fin.
> *Fiat Nox.*

Similar to rhyme is the use of assonance and alliteration, the repetition of vowel and consonant sounds. Detailed examination of his verse shows Leconte de Lisle to be a master in producing musical effect from this device. He is extremely felicitous too, in his choice of words to convey emotions through their sound as well as through their meaning. Just as an example, let me cite one instance. It has been said that French *i, u, é* and *è* have a sharp, thin sound, that express lightness, gentleness, and laughing, idyllic sensations. Speaking of a tiny, brilliantly colored bird he writes:

> Voyant la rosée et le soleil clair
> Luire dans son nid tressé d'herbes fines,
> Comme un frais rayon s'échappe dans l'air . . .

Banville in his *Petit Traité* pointed out the importance of rhyme; and in this he was right. Blank verse has never been effective in French, for the simple reason that phrasal lengths unsupported by rhyme are insufficient to mark the rhythm. Banville, however, went too far: both in claiming that the rhyme is everything, and in claiming that the richer it is the better. In reacting against this wrong tendency, Verlaine on the other hand went too far in the other direction:

> Oh! qui dira les torts de la rime?
> Quel enfant sourd ou quel nègre fou
> Nous a forgé ce bijou d'un sou,
> Qui sonne creux et faux sous la lime?

Leconte de Lisle rhymes richly, but is never a slave to rhyme. He advocated a principle that was excellent, "l'imagination de la rime." The rhyme is not only important for the music, but also because of its position just before a pause. Leconte de Lisle maintained that in order to prolong the sensation during the pause and give the imagination a chance to soar the rhyme should be a word which stirs the imagination as much as possible, instead of letting it fall with a thud, as in such a rhyme as the following for example.

> He raised his eyes and glanced above.
> The skies were pearl grey like a glove . . .

The word 'glove,' which is prosaic enough when compared to the skies, is much more so when placed as a rhyme.

What is the value of rhythm in poetry? and by rhythm I mean all the various effects of repetition which have been mentioned. Under the stress of emotion, one's speech naturally becomes rhythmic, as actual psychological tests have shown. For example, a person's feelings are aroused, and he says: "I am shocked, I am astonished, to hear such principles avowed in this house and in this country." Or under more sudden impulse he may exclaim: "No, no, no, no!"

Further, it makes for unity, economizes attention; and rhythmic stress and inflection make for clearness. Tests show that rhythmic writing can be read more rapidly, and memorized more easily. As pointed out by Mr. A. Lipsky in an interesting article in a journal of psychology:

> Style is elevated above conventionality, and made individual mainly by the pressure of strong emotion in the writer, and the natural result of strong emotion is rhythmical expression.

The converse is of course true as well. Rhythmical expression causes heightened emotion, as is plain from the case of music.

All these devices and others were used by Leconte de Lisle to secure the maximum of music. His knowledge of the material in which he worked, and his power as a craftsman have never been denied.

His vocabulary is unusually large, and his sense of word values precise. In this he resembles Gautier, Hugo, and Flaubert—the last named most of all. In teaching Maupassant the rudiments of his art, Flaubert would tell him to observe an object until he saw in what manner the object—whether it was a cab horse or an oak tree—differed from every other cab horse or oak tree, and then to find the exact word which would convey the impression. Various words "might do;" but there is always *one* word which is more fitting than any of the others. It is the artist's duty, according to Flaubert, to find that exact word. Gautier once told Baudelaire that the inexpressible does not exist. It would be futile to argue whether or not this is true. Unfortunately we do not all speak exactly the same language, and there is nothing absolute about the meaning of words.

Leconte de Lisle used a great number of exotic terms in his poetry. Dealing with exotic subjects there is no reason why he should not have, except that the crowd instinctively objects to anything that is new and different. Lafcadio Hearn's publisher wished to suppress "a multitude of Japanese, Sanskrit, Chinese and Buddhist terms" in the latter's writings. As his biographer, E. Bisland, remarks: "To eliminate these foreign terms was like asking a modern actor to play *Julius Caesar* in a full bottomed wig." Imagine "an

Oriental picture, painted sans Eastern costumes and architecture."

In his poems and translations, Leconte de Lisle reproduced as faithfully as possible the original names of the old Greek gods and heroes. At the time he was called pedantic, and a few of the old school classicists still pretend to be shocked by his accuracy. It was less in the interest of truth, than because of the artistic effect, that he made the innovation. In the first place, there is a confusion between the gods of Greece and Rome, between Zeus and Jove, between Pallas Athene and Minerva. Secondly there are a host of associations with *Diane, Ulysse* and other names used by the French classical poets, which make them not only "superannuated, but too French," to quote M. Cassagne. To restore them to life it was necessary to return to original names.

The vocabulary of our poet has limited the number of his readers to a certain aristocracy of culture, capable of understanding the delicate shadings and force of the many of the words he uses. This has lessened the universality of his work, though it has not made him any less an artist. Admiration for his vocabulary and style, has hurt him also in the eyes of indiscriminate critics, who have not seen that the form is inseparable from the content, at least in the theory and in the practice of Leconte de Lisle.

One cannot isolate words, or phrases, or rhythms and rhyme schemes, and say they are admirable. They must be taken in conjunction with what the author is endeavoring to express. Form is something larger than mere technique, as I shall try to show in connection with the various poems. Leconte de Lisle was not a mere

virtuoso, or we should be justified in spending more time discussing his scales and fingering.

The Parnassians were often ridiculed for their attention to poetic form; and the chief characteristic, externally at least, of the succeeding school of poetry was their cult of formlessness. The very articulateness of the Parnassians was what was most severely criticized. It is true that there were minor poets in the group, like Catulle Mendès, for instance, who undoubtedly possessed an excellent technique and little else. Too great preoccupation with technique is not a healthy sign. But judging from the amount of discussion and writing on the subject of metrics brought forth by the *Décadents* and *Symbolistes* one is tempted to suppose that they are the chief sinners. In his essay on *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* Wilde made the statement that no one thinks so much about money as those who have not any. So here, none of the poets think so much about form as those who pride themselves on their lack of it.

Leconte de Lisle did not write for the mob, nor did he publish what he felt was still only half expressed. His ideal of literary art was similar to that embodied by Gautier in his famous poem, *L'Art*. In every age there will be people whose powers of discernment and of appreciation are fully developed, and who will be able to re-create with joy beautiful verse like that of Leconte de Lisle, made in such a way, and of such material that it will endure forever. Mastery of one's medium is not enough, but without it the most beautiful fabric will perish.

L'ART

Oui, l'œuvre sort plus belle
D'une forme au travail
Rebelle,
Vers, marbre, onyx, émail.
. . . Tout passe.—L'art robuste
Seul a l'éternité,
Le buste
Survit à la cité. . . .
Les dieux eux-mêmes meurent,
Mais les vers souverains
Demeurent
Plus forts que les airains. . . .

PART II

THE POEMS

PART II

THE POEMS

Amy Lowell, in some verses entitled *The Poem,* expresses an ideal which I have set myself in this portion of the book. Verse, she says, is like "a little twig with a green bud at the end; but if you plant it, and water it, and set it where the sun will be above it, it will grow into a tall bush with many flowers. . . ." "But if you take my twig and throw it into a closet . . . some day when you open the door, you will think it an old twisted nail, and sweep it into the dust bin with other rubbish." In accordance with this suggestion, I shall do my best to plant these poems in your heart, where the sun of your appreciation will give them warmth and light.

To enjoy a work of art, we must be ever ready with our sympathies, ever ready to see and feel the peculiar excellencies of that work. When we look at a Turner we must not say: "But where are the somber shadows which give such depth to Rembrandt's work?" And when we gaze on a Rembrandt we must not expect to find the vibrant outdoor light of Claude Monet. His mellow *chiaroscuro* is enough. If we are inclined to apply unyielding standards to the detail of any poem we should say to ourselves: "There is something Walt Whitman has to give us, and there is something with which Milton can enrich our life. What is it?" Or we might repeat with G. H. Palmer of Harvard: "Excellencies are not altogether compatible. We are wise if we discern clearly the kind offered by each poet, if we accept it gratefully, and

uncomplainingly turn elsewhere for worthy qualities of a different type.'' The same applies to the various poems. May we discern the worthy qualities of each!

The following syntheses of Leconte de Lisle's poems are not mere summaries intended to save the reader the trouble of reading the original poems, but are designed to serve as psychological and esthetic commentaries, intermediaries between the poet and his public.

CHAPTER I

POEMS OF LOVE AND PASSION

The first group of poems which we shall consider are those expressing love. We have seen the rôle love played in the youth of the passionate Creole. In his later years, protesting to Jules Huret against the oft-repeated criticism of the younger Dumas that he had "sacrificed his personal emotions, overcome passion, annihilated sensation, strangled sentiments," Leconte de Lisle exclaimed familiarly: "Will they ever get through talking such stuff and nonsense? Impassive poet! Just as long as one doesn't tell how he buttons his trousers, and how his flirtations are going, he is an impassive poet! It's stupid!" It is not surprising however that Dumas *fils* should have failed to see in the poet the very thing that was so evidently lacking in himself. Must we think the same of most of his brother critics?

Le Manchy

Le Manchy is the incarnation of the "eternal first love" that makes poets of us all. It is a vision, evanescent yet exact, beautified by the illusions of youth and rendered clear and indelible by the freshness of the young imagination. The fleeting moment, so precious to the poet in his later years and to those who have felt the same sweet thrill, has been preserved forever, with simple, plastic clarity. It is in a mood of worship that the poet sees the charming object of his first dreams

descend from the heights, in the quiet early morning, to commune with God. The sun is sparkling along the green of the meadows that reach out into the infinite sea; while the clear, winged sound of the bells rises into space like the long flight of birds, visible far off above the gleaming waves. The loved one is not walking on the dusty road; instead she seems to float along in a sort of light sedan chair called a *manchy,* made of rattan and bamboo, and borne by supple Hindus, accompanying their rhythmic step with singing. Through the transparent curtain of the *manchy,* she appears in a cool cloud of filmy white. White, too, are the tunics of the Hindu bearers.

There is another mood. She is the diaphanous phantom of his youthful worship; but she is also the vision of a living body, the phantom of youthful desire. The languid air is fragrant from tamarind trees, and purple fruits. Groups of joyous negroes are responding to the animation of their own music. Languorously the young creole reclines in her *manchy,* at the edge of which one sees a rosy foot and an ankle encircled by an anklet. Her golden hair falls sinuously across a pillow, and her eyes, the color of deep amethyst, are almost closed. A butterfly settles for an instant on her soft skin. Its flower-like wings are tinged with the azure of youthful spirituality and the scarlet of budding desire. Her image was as young and fresh in the heart of the poet as the day he first beheld her, although for many years her body had lain, in one of the little cemeteries that the creoles of Bourbon set apart in the sands beside the ever murmuring sea. Such is the force of his boyhood love that the years can not blot it out, and all who read the poem must likewise feel, as vividly as he, the youthful delicacy and force of that love.

More has been written about *Le Manchy* than any of his other poems. It was one of the first to be translated into English. Most interesting of all is the light which Leconte de Lisle himself has thrown upon the poem, in a note to Jean Dornis, in which he says: "This might be called: *How Poetry was Awakened in the Heart of a Boy of Fifteen.* In the first place it is thanks to the good fortune of being born in a land that is marvelously beautiful and half wild, rich in strange vegetation, beneath a dazzling sky. Above all, it is thanks to the eternal 'first love,' a mingling of vague desires and delightful timidity: the budding impressionability of a virgin heart and soul, stirred with an innate feeling for nature. . . ." Already we have an intimation of the method of expression most often associated with the Parnassians. We are made to feel the emotion indirectly, through a description of surroundings that are completely expressive.

We find the vision of this maid who charmed his earliest dreams, recurring in his later poems like the prolongation of an echo. Gradually the image grows less voluptuous, until in *Epiphany* it is wholly etherealized, much as the little Bice of Dante's *New Life* becomes the radiant Beatrice of the *Paradise.* As de Sanctis has pointed out in an essay on the women of Leopardi, memory is the queen of the muses, the good fairy that transforms and idealizes life, the great unconscious artist that eliminates all that is least significant, or inharmonious, until only the essential aspects remain. The vision of youth is beautified by illusion, while memory's vision is further beautified by sublimation, that gives us only the harmonious, the eternal.

In the *Illusion Suprême,* we behold again the same diaphanous phantom, like a soft and melancholy emana-

tion of the dawn, in the midst of sorrow and disillusion. Her grace and beauty transcend death and time. She smiles to him now from an enchanted world, with eyes that are divine.

Epiphanie [1]

In *Epiphany* the spiritualization is complete. We are no longer in the real world of the Tropics, with its languor and voluptuousness. We are in a dream world of the far North. It is still dawn. The dazzling sea has given place to the pale azure of a cool and limpid lake. Instead of the purple fruits and odorous tamarind trees, there is the silvery birch. Desire has given way completely to a mood of serene worship, of mysticism. In *l'Illusion Suprême,* her immortality was still worldly, albeit enchanted, as she smiled to the poet. In *Epiphany* she passes into the presence of Divinity, in a world of celestial love. The *ideal* alone remains.

The poem is unique in modern French literature, although the process of idealization which produced it is inherent in each one of us. For a parallel one must go to Plato, to the poets of chivalry, and to Dante, or to a modern disciple of Dante, the author of the *Blessed Damozel.*

Le Parfum Impérissable

In *Le Parfum Impérissable* we feel again the beautifying force of memory. Like Musset in the poem entitled *Souvenir,* the poet recalls a love that was unhappy, but recalls it with joy. With the passing of time, all the bitterness and sorrow has been transformed by "the good fairy," Memory. Sorrow and pain have an intensity more acute than joy or pleasure, as Schopenhauer has ably pointed out. What he fails to point out is that the

[1] Poem and translation, pp. 186, 187.

normal individual banishes the memory of pain into the depths of the subconscious, while the memory of the experience, and any joy associated with it, remains. Musset, simply describing the memory of his unhappy love for George Sand as recalled some years later by a visit to the scene of their love, has produced one of the most beautiful poems in the French language. *Le Parfum Impérissable* is less definitely autobiographical, and far more condensed. It is a not unworthy companion-piece however to *Souvenir.*

Musset uses a landscape revisited to evoke the memory of an old love. Other poets have employed familiar sounds, but Leconte de Lisle has used the nostalgic power of perfume; and nothing brings up the past with all its fringe of feeling, more swiftly, more hauntingly, than odors laden with association. Furthermore there is something physical yet secret, invisible, and mysterious—one might almost say spiritual—which establishes a natural association between perfume and love, especially the perfume of the rose and love. One might write a volume on the use of the rose as a symbol of love in poetry, from the earliest verse of the Persians, to that of the Pléiade, in whatever lands the rose is cultivated. The persistency of certain perfumes is truly amazing. The crystal vial that holds the essence of the rose may break, the sea may flood it with its countless waves, and yet the broken bits retain the fragrance. It is this subtle persistence that Leconte de Lisle has seized upon, with originality and striking fitness, to express the undying joy of a love preserved and beautified by memory. It is not in the morbid, or perhaps factitious spirit of the young romantic poets, that glory in their sorrows, or in a spirit of ascetic resig-

nation, but rather in a mood that each of us may feel, that Leconte de Lisle exclaims:

Qu'il lui soit pardonné, que mon mal soit béni!

It is one of the greatest blessings of human nature that even our deepest sorrows may be transformed by time and may even come to be a source of pleasure.

In *Les Plaintes du Cyclope* he writes:

Et le temps qui peut tout, emportera les maux!

Thestylis [2]

Thestylis is one of the poems most universally admired by Anglo-Saxon readers, though usually omitted from the anthologies because of its length. The landscape is that of Sicily, and the manner much like that of Theocritus. There is a period in the life of nearly every human being when one is more in love with love than with any particular person. It is a semi-religious sentiment, a tranquil exaltation tinged with sadness. It is this transitory feeling that Leconte de Lisle has so adequately expressed in these verses. The poem is so simple and clear, and yet so fragile and ethereal withal, that one hesitates to burden it with comments.

It opens with the tranquil evening, bearer of mysteries. The maiden is standing on a mountain above the sea, which gives her a feeling of infinite elation. The twilight, the distant lowing of oxen, and the far-off murmur of the sea add a touch of melancholy. She is alone and waiting for the unseen lover, the young Immortal, on whose altar she has poured all the perfumes of her heart, whose lovely music she imagines she has heard in the thickets leading the chorus of the

[2] Poem and translation, pp. 188, 189.

Muses. Her lover does not appear; but such is her beauty, and above all her confidence in the power of beauty over gods as well as men, that her sadness is only momentary. It is this accent of pure love exalted by a mystic cult of the beautiful which gives the poem its seal of originality.

It never could have been written by any one save Leconte de Lisle.

Kléarista

Thestylis has a companion piece, *Kléarista.* The beauty of the dawn above the dew-drenched wheat fields, and the beauty of the sweetly laughing Sicilian girl are blended inseparably. The Hybla shepherd sees the image of his dream approaching through the rosy mist. He says: "It was night, and now it is morning!" And, more radiant than dawn on the far away horizon, "the sun rises in his heart."

Ç̣unacépa

Leconte de Lisle's most original contribution to literature lies in his marvelous understanding and interpretation of the literature of a country which esthetically and metaphysically long ago had reached an extraordinary state of refinement—India. In Ç̣unacépa he has taken an episodic legend from the *Ramayana,* and with different heroes and different incidents, he has given the spirit of the great epic, and some of the chief elements of interest. In doing so he has given added life to the original, without violating the character of the epic as a whole. For those who prefer their literature with a label, one might call it a narrative epic lyric. It is a story, in

which the gods appear; but every part tends to make us share the love of Çunacépa and Çanta.

The poem opens with a description of a tropical dawn:

> Tout s'éveille, vêtu d'une couleur divine. . . .

Everything laughs and sparkles: the river and the hill; the gorge where, at night, the tiger howled; and the transparent lake starred, with lotus. Even the wise-men, wrapped in their ascetic dreams, aware of the flowing sap, and the fire circulating through the keen blue air, arise with renewed youth.

> Sentant courir la sève et circuler le feu,
> Se dressent rajeunis dans l'air subtil et bleu.

They know however that *Mâyâ*, the eternal illusion, mother of the world, "laughs at everything under the sun that walks and weeps." They know that all is a dream.

In this introduction, the power and beauty of life and love, suggested by the description, stand out in contrast to the ascetic ideal of the vanity of all things.

Çunacépa is the least loved, but the handsomest of the Richi's sons. He is looking sadly with lowered lids to the light-flooded East:

> Où la vièrge naïve aux beaux yeux de gazelle,
> Parle de loin au cœur qui s'élance vers elle.

He must wait another day before he sees his beloved. Once more the sun motif appears suggesting love: Sûryâ, the burning god, like a block of diaphanous crystal, grows and climbs, and the flowers languorously fold their golden petals.

Suddenly the old Maharajah, the king of men, resembling the great god Indra, stops before the humble thresh-

old of the pious Richi. The splendor of the King and his following of thousands of warriors is of a dazzling sumptuousness such as only an oriental mind could conceive. The King must find a youth to offer as a human sacrifice to Indra. Only the Richi's sons are sufficiently pure; they are predestined. Indra is angry, and if the sacrifice is not made, drought and famine will cause the human race to perish. In return, the King will grant the Richi wealth.

No matter how dire the consequences, he refuses to give up his first born, and his wife loves the youngest too tenderly. Cunecépa's pride is immense. An Oriental, he feels more strongly than an Occidental could his duty to his parents, to his Lord. There is nothing to do but offer himself, in spite of the intense desire to live which love has given him. He only asks for one day of grace, so that he may see his beloved again.

He contemplates the sensuous beauty of the South, luxuriant and abounding in life, youth, and vigor. Pressing his folded arms against his heart he weeps, not that he regrets leaving the great, beautiful world, but leaving Çanta:

> Mais plus que la nature et que ce dernier jour,
> O fleur épanouie aux baisers de l'amour,
> O Çanta, coupe pure où ses lèvres fidèles
> Buvaient le flot sacré des larmes immortelles,
> C'étaient toi qu'il pleurait, toi, son unique bien,
> Auprès de qui le monde immense n'était rien!

The description of their meeting is as beautiful as it is sad. "Supple as a reed beneath her white garments," she runs to meet her beloved. Her bracelets tinkle joyously, as she throws her beautiful bare arms about her

lover's neck, forming an amber collar, soft and warm. In her sorrow on learning his fate she seems more beautiful than ever before:

> Avec ses longs yeux noirs de pleurs étincelants,
> Et ses bras de lotus enlacés et tremblants,
> Ses lèvres de corail, et flottant sur sa joue
> Ses longs cheveux épars que la douleur dénoue.

She proposes that they flee to the forests and mountains. "The great striped tigers prowl by hundreds there; but better the tiger than man, with his heart of flint!"

A struggle ensues between his filial duty, his promise, and his fear of the gods on the one hand, and his love on the other. A great Bird, the king of the Vultures, comes to their rescue and suggests that they visit the hermit Viçvamitra, whom austere ascetic practices have rendered god-like.

There is a long period of suspense, while the stern holy-man, inspiring awe and terror, refuses to aid them, saying that it is "vain to laugh or to weep, and vain to love or curse." Life and love are but the shadows of a dream.

> Va! le monde est un songe et l'homme n'a qu'un jour,
> Et le néant divin ne connaît pas l'amour!

Then Çanta pleads with him, with all the force of her tenderness. The ascetic is at last moved. He hears for a moment the wild bird of his own youth, singing in the coverts of the joyous forest; and, as foreshadowed in the introduction, he yields to the sunlight of love. After telling Çunacépa that the latter will live, the hermit resumes his meditations, wrapping himself again "in eternal silence, like a drop of water melting into the vastness of the Ocean."

The ceremony of the sacrifice is most impressive. The young man mounts the fatal stone. "His tense limbs are bound to the pillar, and the priest is about to plunge the knife in his breast." A thunderbolt crashes against the pillar. A snow white stallion sent by Indra to take his place falls at the Brahmin's feet. Çunacépa is free!

Standing out in contrast against the background of Hindu asceticism, the lover's sudden burst of joy is like a gleam of red against a wide gray field. What does it matter if life is mostly sorrow, and all is "a dream within a dream"?

> O ray of sunlight striving through the night,
> O happiness! how swift thy flash of light!
>
> As soon as thy illusion disappears,
> The soul is torn more fiercely by its fears;
> And yet what tears, what evil can destroy
> The lasting sweetness of thy briefest joy!

The final scene between the lovers is one of tender voluptuousness, of purity of passion, revealed by the tropical landscape in a splendid hymn to Life.

Perhaps nowhere in the ancient world has love been expressed with as much directness and naturalness as in the sacred writings of the Hindus. In Greece its highest expression was inclined to be mystical, often between persons of the same sex. In Rome it was more sensual and often attended by a touch of cruelty. The tendency of Christianity was to stamp it as a sin, or as a handmaiden to duty or pride. Perhaps our conception is more moral, and the source of great beauty, but theirs too is full of poetry.

Fully to realize Leconte de Lisle's creative power, one has only to compare this poem with its source, as Taine

compared La Fontaine's fables with their sources. This shows us graphically and in as concrete a manner as possible the greatness of the French poet. The comparison has been made in an admirable scholarly fashion by Joseph Vianey in *Les Sources de Leconte de Lisle.*

The Master has not only condensed much of the spirit of the *Ramayana,* a poem which has proved its greatness by age-long survival in the hearts of cultivated readers, but has added to its beauty. The original episode expresses love of life struggling against filial duty, when the young man is sold by his father. In the version by Leconte de Lisle this love of life gains force through the addition of the love element (borrowed from other portions of the Hindu epic), through the heightening of the ascetic background, and through the mood expressed by the landscape. The essence of the original remains, but in a form that is more colorful, stronger, and more delicate.

Le Baiser Suprême [3]

It would seem impossible that so much feeling could be crowded into five lines. Perhaps it could not be, were it not for the statue by Christophe on which it is carved, and which is to be seen in the Luxembourg in Paris. The work of the poet and that of the sculptor complete each other. *Çunacépa* also helps us to feel the force of this poem. The means of expression are similar. Compare the lines:

> And yet what tears, what evil can destroy
> The lasting sweetness of thy briefest joy!

In a sense Leconte de Lisle is a pessimist. His life was a series of disappointments, yet he does not negate life and beauty. He is not an ascetic. He merely realizes

[3] Poem and translation, pp. 202, 203.

that life is fundamentally a tragedy, in the sense that for one good thing that we obtain, we must sacrifice a hundred others, and the greater the good that we obtain, the greater usually are the sacrifices that we must make. He who hitches his wagon to a star must be prepared to be hurled through space!

There are two possible interpretations. The poem may express "*la soif de l'idéal,*" love of the impossible, or it may be interpreted simply as a sex symbol, as revealed by the Freudian psychology. As such, it touches on a universal human complex. It is a vision such as everyone has dreamed, but it is more complete, more intense: the sex dream of a race, or of a genius. The chimera, half human, half beast, is the expression of a universal sex association.

For a similar manifestation in the graphic arts one must turn to Goya. In the series of the *Proverbs* there is a fantastic etching of a woman suspended in mid air by a rearing stallion which holds her garment in his teeth. In one corner appears the huge head of an animal like a wolf swallowing a woman. A single eye and the long muzzle of some fabulous beast are just visible. In the faces of all three there is a look of fierce intensity, sufficient to inspire terror, but the expression of the woman, suspended as though floating in the air, is one of abandon and pleasure. Another etching shows a young man and woman seated on a hippogriff flying upward into the darkness. Her arms are extended helplessly, while his are tightly wrapped about her. His back is arched, his hair is flying in the wind. A flood of light strikes the haunches of the beast, which terminate in claws, extended as though about to clutch its prey. In its eyes there is a gleam of cruel irony foreboding prompt destruction; but

the lover is heedless of everything, as they dizzily mount into the blackness of death.

The meaning is clear. Goya and Leconte de Lisle have intuited a great truth, which modern psychology has recently brought to light, and which enables us better to understand this brief but fascinating poem.

Christine

In an essay on a book of poems inspired by folk-song, Gustavo Bécquer, a Spanish contemporary of Leconte de Lisle, wrote: "The masses have always been and always will be the great poet in every age, and in every nation." With folk-song there is a process of natural selection in which only the fittest survive. Owing to their not being written, only the best of them are handed down. The fact also that they have no fixed form leaves them open to constant improvement. The touch of many hands and long survival is thus a guarantee of *ethos*. They must necessarily appeal to what is deep rooted in the general heart of man. On the other hand, being the work of many minds, they usually lack unity of construction. There are many broken threads, awaiting the touch of the master hand, the artist, to weave them into a living whole.

This is what Leconte de Lisle has done in a great number of poems, inspired by mythology, legend, and folk-song. To cite the authors who have borrowed from the people, in order to give the people back "their own," would be almost equivalent to citing a list of the most universal writers.

If the Master withdrew from contemporary society, it was because society was more interested in making railroads and factories than in making songs. Science, how-

ever, in the shape of "humanistic" research was throwing open new fields of beauty, which brought our poet back to the springs of human feeling. In addition to the old sources, renewed by scientific study, new treasures were revealed not only from the Orient and the New World, but from the North as well, England, and Scandinavia.

The deepest beauty is the most human. It belongs to all ages and all lands. As we develop more and more the international mind we learn first to tolerate and then to love what is best in other nationalities. Each race is, in one direction or another, a little more "human" than any other race: that is to say, it has learned to cultivate better and develop further its fundamental humanity. Japan can give us color prints, and Persia, rugs and roses.

Greece and Rome were familiar ground for the French public and critics. Lack of familiarity with Leconte de Lisle's Hindu material caused even as sympathetic a person as Daudet to laugh instead of trying to understand. Similarly his Northern poems are the object of derision on the part of a critic as intelligent as Maurice Spronck, who claims that there is, in Leconte de Lisle, a "tearful versifier, who—when the man of genius sleeps—is fond of pseudo-German ballads like *The Elfs* and *Christine.*"

In the first place they are not pseudo-German, but authentically Scandinavian, except for the changes and additions made by the poet in the spirit of the original literatures, to heighten them, and give them unity. In these poems, as in Çunacépa, the improvements reveal the touch of genius. In reworking the folk-lore of the North he followed in the footsteps of Heine and Goethe with the same deftness and insight, bringing us the mystery and profound sadness that hovers over the poetry of the North

140010

like a mist above a great pine forest. Sunlight is beautiful, but darkness too casts a spell.

Love and death, are they not the two great springs of feeling revealed in the poetry of the people? The Swedish folk-song from which *Christine* is taken expresses the pathos of two lovers separated by death, but ends on a note which tends to negate the pathos, although in itself it carries a beautiful thought.

Each time you let a tear fall, my coffin is filled with blood.
Each time your heart is gay, my coffin is filled with rose petals.

The thought that the dead would not wish us to grieve is one which makes us bear our grief with lighter heart. It has occurred to everyone. Christine returns consoled from the tryst with her dead lover.

In Leconte de Lisle's poem it is an emotion, love, which we find expressed. Christine does not heed his plea to return:

Voici les pins noirs du vieux cimetière.
—Adieu, quitte-moi, reprends ton chemin,
Mon unique amour, entends ma prière!—
Mais elle au tombeau descend la première,
Et lui tend la main.

Quite in keeping with the supernatural atmosphere of the source, this dénouement, in which the maiden offers to share his "icy tomb . . . when the winter wind sighs in the forest, and the cold rain drips upon the graves," brings out the strength of her affection. One is reminded of Musset's tale in verse, taken from Boccaccio, *Simone et Silva:* written in an entirely different vein.

Cette fois ce fut au jeune homme
A céder la moitié du lit
. . . , et la mort fit
Ce que l'amour n'avait pu faire.

The verses which, in the original, simply express an idea contribute here to the central theme: love, not only all powerful, but eternal.

Les Elfes [4]

The folk-song from which *Les Elfes* was taken was extremely popular. No less than fifteen different versions had been collected in Sweden. The one used by Leconte de Lisle was published by Heine, and forms an excellent poem in itself. Leconte de Lisle kept all the finest touches and has rendered it more powerfully poetic, until it is a worthy companion piece to Goethe's *Erlking*. In the original we miss the suggested loveliness of the elves; and their queen is more prosaic:

> "Listen, Lord Oluf, come and dance with me:
> I will give you two ram-hide boots.

Also the introduction of the knight's mother, who shares in the final tragedy, divides the interest and lessens the effect.

The poem of *The Elves* is highly appreciated. An evidence that M. Spronck's judgment is not the prevailing one is shown by the fact that the work is found in most anthologies. It is very musical. There is something haunting about the refrain; which is not only repeated after each verse, but appears also at the beginning.

> Couronnés de thym et de marjolaine,
> Les Elfes joyeux dansent sur la plaine.

Primitive songs, especially the old ballads of the North, owe half their charm to the refrain. Here it is used as a foil, a gay lilting note of mockery, against the somber tragedy of the verses suggested in the opening by the

[4] Poem and translation, pp. 192, 193.

mass of dark shadows, pierced by a single ray of light. The description is intentionally vague. It is with the eyes of our imagination that we see the young queen and her whirling band, and seem to hear the magic strains of the Berlioz *Ballet des Sylphes.* But as the vision of his bride, with her clear, sweet eyes, is ever before the knight, all the enchantments of the fairy queen fail. He not only does not yield to her offers of magic gifts, but braves her terrible powers, of which he is well aware; for although he repulses her unhesitatingly, the warrior trembles, brave man though he is, when she touches his heart with her white finger. After thus building up the strength of the knight's love, what could be more dramatic than the dénouement? Her fatal touch, instead of killing him, takes from him what is far more precious than his own life—the life of his bride, whom he does not recognize at first in the white phantom that lifts its arms to him. Thus we are prepared gradually for the final tragedy, which gathers increasing momentum, until, as in *Romeo and Juliet,* we feel the supreme force of love that manifests itself in the death of both lovers.

CHAPTER II

THE SORROWS OF LOVE

The French have a saying, "Happiness has no history." Nothing is harder to express than joy. The makers of fairy tales invariably avoided the task with the final words: "and they lived happily ever afterwards." There are two main reasons. One is that pain is more intense than pleasure, and through literature we may live a life of deep intensity without paying the penalty of actual suffering. To live harmoniously in society we stifle innumerable primitive impulses which cry for expression. Life in civilization is a surface existence. It is vicariously in art that we can *really* live.

There is another reason. Many unfulfillable desires, many fears and sorrows come into our lives, and are promptly banished to that limbo of the mind—the subconscious. Even there they can fester and do us harm. Whereas, if adequately formulated, intellectualized, articulated by the imagination—call the process by whatever name you will—they may be a source of joy.

These suppressed passions are like a mountain torrent, such as Leconte de Lisle described in his native Island, plunging headlong down the mountain side, carrying away herds of oxen, uprooting vast trees. If the waters are led into the proper channels they flow along smoothly, or compressed into narrow limits they rise in fountains giving us delight. In such a manner we may be freed from the tyranny of our emotions. Pyschoanalysis is for the more or less abnormal person, and it is a means to an

end, while *katharsis,* or expression, the purging of the soul, is simply an end in itself, a source of joy to every normal person. Croce puts it in somewhat different terms. To him the joy of expression is that of activity overcoming passivity, the joy of acting upon our feelings, instead of being acted upon by them. He is quite right, as was Aristotle, in his formulation of *katharsis;* but the latter does not go far enough, in confining the process to only two emotions, pity and terror; Aristotle likewise is mistaken in limiting it to the Drama alone.

Our deepest pleasures come perhaps from the esthetic possibilities of expressing sorrow. Seneca must have felt this when he wrote: "True joy is a solemn thing." It is a source of comfort to think that even though life is as full of sorrows as a blackberry bush of thorns, our very grief may turn to happiness through the magic wand of Art. I have come back to the subject of *katharsis* again, because of its importance here. Many people have turned away from poetry, and from Leconte de Lisle especially, because they felt that he was gloomy. It is because they have remained passive, because they have lacked the poetic spark which banishes the darkness and causes "the sun to rise within the soul."

El que quiere cantar bien
Canta cuando tenga penas.
He who wishes to sing well
Sings when he is sorrowing.

Thus sang an anonymous singer of the people in a Spanish folk-song.

C'est ainsi que chantait l'antique Polyphème. . . .

'Tis thus that ancient Polyphemus sang;
And with the song his love and sorrow fled.

The Muses helping us to dry our tears,
Alone can heal us of our many woes.

Les Plaintes du Cyclope is an interesting statement of this relief in articulation, and helps us to understand the group of poems which we are about to consider.

There are poets like Musset or Burns who in telling us of their personal sorrows are like a friend who unbosoms his soul to us. We are pleased by their confidence, and when grief is fresh upon us we turn to them as to a friend, and unburden ourselves to them. Musset's *Nights,* in which he tells of his unhappy love for George Sand, are poems which console us wonderfully at certain moments. It is as though in him we had an ever ready, sympathetic friend. Leconte de Lisle, on the other hand, does not wait for our moods. We can read him with delight at any moment. His lyrics both generate the mood and satisfy it; they belong more definitely to the realm of art. I would not say that they are finer, or more beautiful, but they are more complete. The world needs both.

Les Roses d'Ispahan

There is a sort of monotony in the music of this poem, which gives a certain hypnotic effect, lulling and voluptuous. One is reminded of oriental music, which holds the listener in a state of revery for a long time, with endless repetition of a simple theme. It is a poem of the senses, sweet with the odors of roses, jasmin, and orange blossoms, and sad with the vague sadness of the senses. As Baudelaire sang:

Le printemps adorable a perdu son odeur.

The oriental lover is oblivious of the charming landscape,

and though he does not say so, he feels like the lover in Burns' *Bonie Doon:*

> Thou minds me o' the happy days,
> When my fause love was true.

As in the Scotch poem, the charm of Nature as described by the poet acts as a foil to the lover's sadness, making it stand out. Nor is this a purely literary device. Statistics show that there is a direct ratio between beautiful days and suicides. They are fewest in December, and most common in June. But here it is no question of suicide, but of love as light as perfume, the wing of a butterfly, or the song of a bird.

Le Dernier Souvenir [1]

The contrast with the next poem is most striking. Both express the sorrows of love, but the former is the sorrow one feels when deprived of a love that goes no deeper than the senses, the mere surface of the heart; while the latter is the sorrow that kills, that leaves one a living corpse. In one of his beautiful *Rimas* the Spanish poet, Bécquer, has given us an idea of this sort of grief, when, after describing the monotonous gloom of a life that goes on and on with something broken inside, feeling neither joy nor grief, he even regrets the first bitter moments, because to suffer is to live ("padecer es vivir"), and nothing is more deadly than the sort of death in life that follows a deep sorrow. It is the same sentiment expressed by Verlaine when he wrote:

> Sans amour et sans haine,
> Mon cœur a tant de peine.

[1] Poem and translation, pp. 240, 241.

Leconte de Lisle on the other hand, after describing in imaginative terms this sort of living death, has the protagonist renounce life entirely when the original sorrow is finally revived.

It is one of the most powerful poems in any language. I shall never forget the first time I heard it. I was with a poet, a Creole like Leconte de Lisle, who was living on the sixth story of an ancient house in the Latin Quarter. It was a night in January, and as there was probably no fire anywhere in the huge stone building, it seemed warmer with the window open. In the courtyard large flakes of snow were slowly falling, glimmering palely against the blackness as they passed the band of light from the open window. Listening to the verses, admirably recited by the poet, it seemed as though the terrible figure was descending into the measureless abyss before one's very eyes. The power to portray the purely imaginary with such vigor as to approximate hallucination has been given to few poets, and is found in few poems. Dante possessed it in a supreme degree. It is interesting to note, in passing, that the poem is written in Dante's favorite form—the terza rima. In this poem, as in *Quaïn* and a few others, Leconte de Lisle shows a similar vigor of imagination, coupled with a dramatic sense which concentrates the full power of the poem in the final line.

In his excellent essay on Leconte de Lisle in *L'Evolution de la poésie lyrique,* Brunetière makes the following (almost the only) restriction on his admiration: "Let us grant, for example, that in its sculptural placidity this poetry often has something about it not at all cold—I think I have shown you quite the contrary—but something hard: I mean by that, decisive, too precise in outline, which leaves no place for the freedom or vagary of

imagination of the reader." This is true to a certain extent, but we should remember that the very clearness of his imagination can hardly be a fault when describing the strange and the unfamiliar, as is the case in most of his poems.

Pantouns Malais [2]

Speaking of the monuments at Persepolis, Renan said: "One sees each tributary nation of the Persian King represented by a personage wearing the costume of his country, and holding in his hands the products of his province to present them as an homage to the sovereign." Such is humanity: each nation, each intellectual, religious, or moral unit leaves behind it a brief expression, which is in a way an abridgment and a type, and which remains forever to represent the millions of men forever forgotten, and who were grouped about it when they died. "Such is, gentlemen, the local color of the poetry of Leconte de Lisle," adds Brunetière. "*La Mort de Valmiki, la Vision de Brahma, Khiron, Niobé, Quaïn, Néférou-Râ, l'Epée d'Angantyr, le Massacre de Mona,* Hindu, Greek, Egyptian, Hebrew, Celtic or Scandinavian, in all these poems one finds the abridged type of an entire 'nation,' a historic period, a religious or intellectual 'unit,' which he has planned to incarnate; and if it is not yet the alliance of science and poetry, it is already at least that of poetry and learning." To the list of poems already quoted he might have added *Pantouns Malais.*

The significant fact is not that Leconte de Lisle was a man of learning. Dante was one of the most learned men of his time, but it is not that which makes him great. Both poets gathered the flowers as well as the fruits of scholarship, and having done so, they satisfy one of the

[2] Poem and translation, pp. 204, 205.

primary human instincts, which is itself at the basis of learning, the instinct of curiosity. They satisfy the universal desire to know, and they satisfy the equally fundamental desire for immortality. Dante does it in a supernatural or compensatory manner. He gives us a dream of immortality and eternity. Leconte de Lisle does this in a natural, or expressionist manner, by presenting the essence of a "period" or a "race" imbued with the eternal life which erudition lacks, and poetry alone can give.

The form of this poem is itself Malayan. It is a folk-form evolved by a group of singers, one of whom begins a song; the next in turn repeats two lines of his predecessor's stanza and adds two more, until the group, seated in a circle, has produced a complete song. The large amount of repetition might easily become monotonous were it not for a certain vagueness and the variety introduced by making it a two-part song—to borrow a musical term. Two themes constantly alternate, now contrasting, now harmonizing, making the general effect not only extremely musical, but suggestive of the primitive music of the land. In the form itself, too, there is a crescendo effect obtained by lengthening the phrasal sections gradually toward the climax in the Fourth Part, and shortening them again in the last.

The most striking thing about the Malayan Archipelago is the combination of Eastern refinement and voluptuousness with primitive savagery.

It is the land of the typhoon and the snaky creese. It is the land of the curious custom of running amôk, which makes the man who has brooded over his wrongs rush out into the village and strike down whoever is in his path, until he too is finally struck down.

In *Pantouns Malais* the poet has expressed an emotion which is based on a mingling of the instincts of sex, self-

regard, and pugnacity; in other words, the emotion of jealousy. As pointed out by McDougall, jealousy is largely the "painfully checked positive self-feeling." Love demands reciprocation, which in turn stimulates the elation of the ego. When the reciprocation is withdrawn, the individual suffers intense sorrow from the checking of the two main instincts, and at that moment a third, the instinct to destroy, to strike blindly is called into play. This fundamental linking of the instincts and corresponding emotions is inherent in all of us, inhibited by social restraint. It furnishes one of the chief motifs of Spanish drama, and is not merely the expression of "the point of honor,"—but rather of a group of fundamental emotions. It is the subject matter of the greatest of acting dramas—*Othello*. No lyric poem perhaps expresses this complex emotion of jealousy better than the *Malayan Pantuns*.

Part I contains the double theme of voluptuousness, and the wild passion of the storm.

> L'ombre est en proie au vent hurleur,
> Il s'engouffre au fond des ravines.
> Tu rêves et souris, ma fleur!
> Le cœur plein de chansons divines.

Being acquainted with the object of the Malay's passion, we feel the full force of it in the Second Part, when we learn that he has committed murder, in order to adorn her with jewels. As with Helen of Troy, there is no horror which her beauty does not cause us to forget—even the dead men with the moon shining on their upturned faces.

> Mais est-il rien que tu n'effaces?
> Tes longs yeux sont un double éclair.
> La lune reluit sur leurs faces,
> L'odeur de sang parfume l'air.

Here too we are being prepared for the final tragedy.

His love is eternal and proud, proud as the soaring hawk. Her love must be his alone, for all time.

> Il t'aimera jusqu'à la tombe!
> O femme, n'aime qu'une fois!
> L'épervier poursuit la colombe;
> Elle rend l'âme au fond des bois.

In the Fourth Part the love motif appears again, together with the ominous picture of the tiger, with which it at first contrasts, and then blends, as the love motif changes to one of savage anger and death.

> Tu cours et bondis mieux que les gazelles,
> Mais ton cœur est traître et ta bouche ment!
> Il a vu jaillir deux jaunes prunelles;
> Un frisson de mort l'étreint brusquement.

The poem closes as it opens, with the vast horizon of the storm-swept sea suddenly illumined by piercing streaks of lightning. This rounding out is noticeable also in the repetition of the first line at the end of each part; but it does not seem forced or artificial as in the shorter rondeau form. It is effective, not so much because it gives a sense of completeness—the perfection of the circle—but because, as pointed out in the pages on repetition, it heightens the emotional tone.

What could be more effective than the ending of the poem, with the vision of the Malay in his little craft scudding out in search of oblivion over the measureless black abyss. There is a suggestion of Salome in the severed head, which he has attached to the mast of his *prao*. There is this difference, however: Salome's savagery is insufficiently motivated, except through degeneracy, while the Malay's motives are universal, and the poem has more *ethos*.

The feeling of the protagonist that his tragedy was the result of fate is characteristic of the Mohammedanism of the Malays.

Notice also the note of horror, as he wakens to a realization of what he has done. Actions which spring from the subconsciousness, committed in a blind fury, give one the feeling of wakening from a dream, when consciousness again asserts itself. It is the moment of deepest tragedy.

Est-ce bien toi que j'ai tuée?
C'était le destin, je t'aimais!
L'éclair fend la noire nuée,
L'abîme s'ouvre pour jamais.

Nurmahal

On its lyrical side *Nurmahal* is the cry of anguish of one who has been betrayed and prefers death to betrayal. In addition, it is what might be called a poem of experience, or narrative historical poem. Besides "purging the soul" of feeling, it gives us a chance to live the luxurious, mysterious life of the Far East. It is founded on historical truth, though the facts are changed to suit the exigencies of art. It opens with a dazzling picture showing the gorgeous splendor of the Mongol Emperor's palace in India. It is one of the most sumptuous descriptions in all poetry. Though beautified by the imagination of the artist selecting and eliminating, it is no merely fanciful picture. If ever there was a real Arabian Nights setting it was in the palace of the great Mogul.

In spite of all his wealth and beautiful surroundings the king is sad. He is in love with Nurmahal, the wife of Ali-Khan, a warrior, who is away fighting. The picture of the beautiful Persian is extremely voluptuous as she

reclines on silky cushions under the tamarind trees in her garden negligently dipping her toes in the waters of the pool, while the cool evening air plays over her body, and the moon through the leaves caresses her coral lips with a fairy kiss. Most beautiful is the description of her voice as it rises through the night. Nothing has a stronger emotional effect than the human voice. The love she inspires in the King is sensuous and imperious. Its passion stops at nothing. But Nurmahal has sworn fidelity to Ali-Khan until death.

Her ambitions are realized. All the wealth and power of the great Emperor are at her disposal. Ali's house is silent. Reptiles sleep in the grass-grown courtyard. But she has kept her word; on his joyous return, the steel of hate penetrated his heart. With the blow of a dagger Nurmahal became a widow and an Empress. In a cry that voices the despair of all who have been deceived, the poet exalts her determination to murder rather than betray.

> Gloire à qui, comme toi, plus forte que l'épreuve,
> Et jusqu'au bout fidèle à son époux vivant,
> Par un coup de poignard à la fois reine et veuve,
> Dédaigne de trahir et tue auparavant.

CHAPTER III

POEMS OF PRIDE AND REVOLT

Quaïn

By many critics *Quaïn* is considered the masterpiece of Leconte de Lisle. It is true that others have regarded it with execration. As with all of his poems treating Western religion, it has roused other emotions than purely esthetic ones. The anti-clerical struggle has been very intense in France, and has even colored the literary opinion of not a few of the critics. As time goes on a fairer and more artistic view is being taken. *Quaïn* is a very beautiful poem. As Vianey remarks: "The only doubt we uttered was as to whether or not *Quaïn* should be considered as the most beautiful poem in a collection abounding in masterpieces."

The value of the poem is many-fold. On the subjective side it is a powerful expression of the instinct of self-assertion and the feeling of elation. On the objective side it is a vigorous portrayal of three of the most striking portions of the Old Testament: those treating of the Garden of Eden, the Deluge, and the Captivity in Assyria. With a mingling of fancy and history, Leconte de Lisle has rendered these biblical visions more imaginatively and with more fidelity to history than have his models: —the Old Testament itself and the poems with a similar theme by De Vigny, Hugo, and Byron. If his picture displays a certain historic fidelity that makes for vividness, it also contains an expression of his own age, the

Revolutionary Age. The French Revolution produced no poets—in France. It was too immediate. Shelley and Byron were far enough away to have a certain detachment, but even they were too much a part of it to be able to view it clearly and express it. *Quaïn* is the great poem of revolt. As Jules Lemaître wrote: it is "the protest of the body against pain, of the heart against injustice, and of the reason against the unintelligible." It is valuable also for the beauty of its ideas. It contains a philosophy.

As for the form, it has been called epic. Call it what you please. Genres are largely a matter of definition. In his *Petit traité de la Poésie française,* Banville has pointed out that the outer form of this poem is admirably adapted to its aim. The Alexandrin, with five-line stanzas, rhymed a b b a b, give a sweeping rhythm that is very musical, without becoming monotonous throughout the twenty-one pages. What is more important is that while it is long, it is kept in a single key, and a unity of feeling is well sustained to the end.

Let us consider the content. The poem is in the form of a prophetic vision, characteristic of the Bible, and true to human nature. It is laid in the Babylonian Captivity, when Jehovah or Yaveh, "the Hunter," had bowed his chosen people beneath the Assyrian yoke. Bent beneath the weight of horrors, they suffered every atrocity in numb silence. Their princes hung from the gibbets of their captors like raw flesh hanging in the market place, while their virgins wept beneath the eunuch's lash, and somber Iaveh was silent far away on high. It was natural that one of the captives should dream of "the Avenger Cain," Cain the defiant, the powerful.

Leconte de Lisle's vision of the City and the Race of Cain has often been justly admired. It is vaguely reminiscent of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Pyra-

mids, and the Tower of Babel. It reminds one of Hugo at his best.

In passing I might add that these were the lines that came to the mind of the famous Spanish-American poet, Rubén *Darió*, when he first beheld New York.

> Thogorma dans ses yeux vit monter des murailles
> De fer d'où s'enroulaient des spirales de tours
> Et de palais cerclés d'airain sur des blocs lourds;
> Ruche énorme, géhenne aux lugubres entrailles
>
> Où s'engouffraient les Forts, princes des anciens jours.

Toward this enormous hive with its walls of iron, its spiral towers, and its massive bronze-bound castles, honeycombed with gloomy passage-ways, return toward sunset the descendants of the Avenger, a race of gigantic creatures, stronger than the cedar and taller than the pine, serenely beautiful, conscious of their strength and freedom!

> Elles allaient, dardant leurs prunelles superbes,
> Les seins droits, le col haut, dans la sérénité
> Terrible de la force et de la liberté, . . .
>
> Le vent respectueux, parmi leurs tresses sombres,
> Sur leur nuque de marbre errait en frémissant,
> Tandis que les parois des rocs couleur de sang,
> Comme de grands miroirs suspendus dans les ombres,
> De la pourpre du soir baignaient leur dos puissant.

It is a race of Lady Macbeths, of statuesque figures like that of Michael Angelo's *Night*. The purple light of the setting sun is reflected from the red rocks on their powerful backs, as on marble. They are the dream of a vanquished race. Frail humanity has ever dreamed of such creatures. They are the super-men of the past.

Jehovah hates them, he is determined to annihilate them with the Deluge, and sends his messenger with the threat. It is then that Cain, the Avenger, rises from his granite sepulchre on the lofty summit of the City and, facing the sky, addresses the "Jealous God." In a beautiful description he evokes the love and peaceful joy of the Garden of Eden, which is changed to hate and violence when the flaming sword suddenly appears by God's command. It was then that, naked and torn by thorns, threatened with hunger and half dead, Eve gave birth to him, Cain, with a cry of horror that echoed through the desert night.

La foudre a répondu seule à mon premier cri . . .

Cain is not satisfied with his unhappy lot. When all is quiet, he wanders in quest of the distant Eden, the land of earthly happiness. The angel of God halts him. His revolt is useless against the Almighty. "Pray and prostrate thyself!" commands the Messenger; but Cain replies that he will remain upright, with head unbowed! The shameful coward may crawl on bended knee, while Jehovah blesses his flattering fear. *He* will never bend, nor ever cease to cry despairingly for justice.

Je resterai debout! Et du soir à l'aurore,
Et de l'aube à la nuit, jamais je ne tairai
L'infatigable cri d'un cœur désespéré!
La soif de la justice, ô Khéroub, me dévore.
Écrase-moi, sinon, jamais je ne ploîrai!

" Why was I born?" asks Cain.—"You will know tomorrow," the Angel answers.

God's will was done. He who made Abel docile under the yoke slew him by the violent hand of Cain.

Cain prophesies that a day will come when God will say to his victims "Adore!" and they will answer: "No!"

He prophesies the futility of all the tortures of Hell, and all the Hell on earth, when God's representatives here below will tear the flesh of rebels with iron pincers, and sear it in flames. "I shall lash thy priests with immortal scorn," cries Cain. "I shall bring to light the cities submerged in the heaping sands of the desert; I shall confine the waters to their foaming beds, and the little children of the nations, now avenged, will laugh in their cradles, knowing thy name no longer." There is a vague suggestion of the discoveries of science, the exploration of the skies by man, and the happiness to be brought about not through fear of nature or God, but through knowledge and through the mastery of the universe by man.

J'effondrerai des cieux la voûte dérisoire.
Par delà l'épaisseur de ce sépulcre bas
Sur qui gronde le bruit sinistre de ton pas,
Je ferai bouillonner les mondes dans leur gloire;
Et qui t'y cherchera ne t'y trouvera pas.

Et ce sera mon jour! Et, d'étoile en étoile,
Le bienheureux Eden longuement regretté
Verra renaître Abel sur mon cœur abrité.
Et toi, mort et cousu sous la funèbre toile,
Tu t'anéantiras dans ta stérilité.

The end of this prophecy is extremely significant, and places the poem among the great philosophical poems of the world. It is something more than a statement of the problem of evil, something more than a formulation of pessimism. It lights the road along which modern civilization has strode toward progress by its solicitude for *this* world, which has meant the forgetting of the other world. Eden, long placed in the past, is here set in the future. And it is not by passive unresistance to the evil

in the world that evil will be overcome, but through struggle. Obedience to the haughty Kings and Prelates who were God's representatives on earth, was formerly the keynote of thought. It will be only through meeting pride and wilfulness with equal pride that justice will be won for all. It must be through struggle, and not through unthinking passivity, that man will bring about something approximating the happiness of the Earthly Paradise.

Enraged with his own creatures, God determines to destroy them. The description of the flood which follows is one of the most vivid and gigantic pieces of imagining in literature. A realistic touch is added by the picture of the large birds, rising in spirals, drenched with rain. When the highest peak had foamed in the swirling waters, the seer, pale with horror, sees a final vision of Cain, Yaveh's immortal Enemy, ominously striding through the mist toward the enormous Ark showing dimly in the gathering night. Here the poem ends.

The instinct of self-assertion, the feeling of pride was, as we have seen, extremely strong in Leconte de Lisle. It was the chief factor, perhaps, in his creative imagination. In most of us, it is largely suppressed. We cannot assert ourselves without clashing with others' pride. For this reason there is a deep satisfaction in being able to bring this fundamental instinct into play vicariously in the world of art. Health of soul demands the expression of self; the latter being suppressed almost as much as sex by the demands of society.

One of the most powerful ways of presenting self-assertion is to show the individual overcoming the Deity. Prometheus, in that most beautiful myth of Classic times, was defeated, while here Cain is successful. The parallel between the Titan and Leconte de Lisle's Cain has

already been drawn. It is interesting. Both are represented as mighty fighters, defying the gods for the sake of mankind. There is another similar story which is even more illuminating, and is also more apposite. It is the story of *Job,* not as found to-day in the usual editions of the Bible, but as it was probably written originally, without the changes made to suit the ends of orthodox religion. In its early form it is one of the most profound and beautiful of the many biblical masterpieces.

In spite of all his innumerable and ghastly sufferings, and the counsels of his false friends, Job refuses to accept in humility the punishments sent by God. He rebels, exclaiming:

He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.
If the scourge slay suddenly he will mock at the trial of the innocent.
The earth is given into the hand of the wicked:
He covereth the faces of the judges thereof;
If *it be* not *he,* who then is it?

Job IX, 22–24 (*Revised Version*).

Steadfastly denouncing the manifest injustice of God, in allowing the innocent to die as well as the wicked in sudden calamities, like floods and pestilences, and in perverting the very organs of justice to make them instruments of tyranny, Job declares:

Though he slay me, yet will I wait for him:
Nevertheless I will maintain my ways before him.

Job XIII, 15.

Job means that no matter what may befall him he shall speak the truth to God himself. This sublime cry of humanity is one of the most extraordinary expressions of ancient or modern times. Even in the older editions of

the Bible we see God justifying Job in his defiant self-assertion, and rebuking the cringing counselors. The similarity between *Job* and Leconte de Lisle's *Cain* is obvious, except for the reconciliation between God and Job, which probably did not appear in the original version.

Leconte de Lisle has been accused of altering the character of Yaveh. We must remember that there are almost as many different interpretations of him in the Bible itself as there are writers of the Bible. We are accustomed to thinking of him as the God of Jesus in the New Testament, rather than as the Yaveh of the primitive books, the "jealous God," the God to whom human sacrifices were offered.

Quaïn is not only a matchless picture of the legendary past, in which the awful power of Jehovah is more than matched by the gigantic strength of Cain, it is a marvelous vision of the future:

> Et ce sera mon jour! Et d'étoile en étoile,
> Le bienheureux Eden longuement regretté
> Verra renaître Abel sur mon cœur abrité;

As suggested in Leopardi's *La Ginestra*, that profoundest of philosophical poems, man will learn some day that man himself is his only ally in the general struggle with the forces of Nature; and *human* strife will cease. Cain will protect Abel, in the long regretted Eden which man will reconquer, so that a time may come when:

> L'inépuisable joie émane de la Vie;
> L'embrassement profond de la terre et du ciel
> Emplit d'un même amour le cœur universel;
> Et la Femme à jamais vénérée et ravie,
> Multiplie en un long baiser l'Homme immortel.

La Tristesse du Diable [1]

It is easier to live in a world that contains a devil than in one which knows neither God nor Devil. Since we are spiritual beings ourselves, we conceive the universe in terms of spirit; and finding evil in the world, we postulate an evil spirit.

Satan is a fascinating creature. He is the most interesting character in Milton's poems, and divides the interest in *Faust*. It is difficult to vie with such works, and yet, allowing for the shorter compass of this poem, it holds its own remarkably well, and surpasses Carducci's famous invocation to Satan, which lacks the imaginative sweep and high seriousness of the poem by Leconte de Lisle.

The picture of the Evil One gazing over the world stamps itself on the memory. The poem is Miltonic in its cosmic grandeur.

All philosophic explanations of evil which attempt to "explain it away" are like the futile efforts of the ostrich to hide from danger. How much more heroic to gaze on the picture as presented here, to open our ears and hearken to

> Ce lugubre concert du mal universel,
> Aussi vieux que le monde, et que la race humaine . . .

Then we shall feel the need of doing something to make the world a better or a more beautiful place. How much more noble according to our present ways of thinking is Satan's cry of despair than the "servile hosannas" of the "happy cowards" who prostrate themselves before the kings, while the kings in turn prostrate themselves before God—and attempt to maintain the *status quo*.

[1] Poem and translation, pp. 222, 223.

The expression of personal sorrows by the Romantic poets seems petty in comparison with the world sadness so adequately voiced by this poet. The greatest contribution of the past century is the courageous vision of human wrongs, without which they never can be righted.

Le Soir d'une Bataille [2]

The words "freedom" and "liberty" stand for the power to act; power of the individual, of the nation, or of the human race, the latter conception being altogether too infrequent, save in the minds of men like Leconte de Lisle. But it is something more than an idea. It is will-power. And what is the source, in our mental constitution, of the influx of energy which seems to play the decisive rôle in volition? To quote from McDougall, it is: "the supporting or re-enforcing of a desire or conation by the co-operation of an impulse excited within the system of the self-regarding sentiment." In other words, the source of our action lies in our desires, controlled by the intelligence, and given power by the sentiment of self. It is the latter which gives us the *feeling* of freedom.

There is nothing more precious than freedom. Free-will has been the key-stone of religions and systems of metaphysics. The primitive savage reveres it, as does the philosopher. It has been the watchword of many wars and revolutions.

The means of expressing it here is very simple. The horrors of war are described with an intensity which present day realism and the horrors of the Great War have left unrivalled. Terrible, stupid and execrable as it all is to the heart of the poet, he is willing to pay the awful price for something that outweighs the ghastly reality of conflict—human liberty!

[2] Poem and translation, pp. 226, 227.

The poem is full of *ethos;* it has voiced only recently the feelings of millions of people. It is a splendid example of Leconte de Lisle's ability to express the feeling of pride and elation.

On its philosophical side, we must not consider it as a justification of war. The poet believed with the founders of the American Republic, whose ideas sprang from the same source as his own, that justice is sometimes purchased at the price of bloodshed. As Jefferson put it: "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants." But our poet was no believer in war itself as a blessing.

> Soyez maudits devant ces cent mille cadavres
> Et la stupide horreur de cet égorgement.

He felt, no doubt, that a time will come when "war against war" will not be an empty phrase.

Ultra cœlos

Ultra cœlos voices Leconte de Lisle's deep tragedy of temperament. It is the struggle of the heart with the brain; of the mystic, esthetic tendencies with pride and ambition; of the ascetic with the man of action. The struggle is seen again and again in his poems. Usually it is the former that triumphs, as in *L'Illusion suprême* and in *Midi.* Sometimes the two are reconciled, and triumph together over life and sorrow, as in *Le Cœur de Hialmar* and *La Mort de Valmiki.* And occasionally as in this poem it is pride that conquers.

The poet pictures the ecstatic happiness of his youth, absorbed in the beauty of his dreams, and the contemplation of nature. Thinking of this long-lost joy he cries out in despair like Job:

Why did I not die before I knew the crushing weight of sorrow?

The description of the trance-like rapture of his communings with nature is unrivalled except perhaps by Leopardi's *L'Infinito,* and by similar descriptions by Leconte de Lisle himself, for instance, the closing stanzas of *Le Bernica.*

Ravissements des sens, vertiges magnétiques
Où l'on roule sans peur, sans pensée et sans voix!

Then comes the realization that nature is impassible, that she simply mirrors our inner ecstasies. Those of the poet's youth had been the result of his longing to free mankind; and to create verse that would re-echo in other breasts. Therefore to have been satisfied with mere contemplation, or with death, would have been too easy a solution of his difficulties. Likewise it would have been self-deceiving.

Ta coupe toujours pleine est trop près de nos lèvres;
C'est le calice amer du désir qu'il nous faut!
C'est le clairon fatal qui sonne dans nos fièvres:
Debout! Marchez, courez, volez, plus loin, plus haut!

It is a magnificent expression of the urge of pride within him, and of determination to accomplish something great for humanity, in spite of the siren voice of nature crying to him to seek repose. His youthful ambition still dominates all.

C'est lui qui dans mon cœur éclate et vibre encore
Comme un appel guerrier pour un combat nouveau.
Va! nous t'obéirons, voix profonde et sonore,
Par qui l'âme, d'un bond, brise le noir tombeau!

Among the many expressions of the self-regarding sentiment, none are more vigorous than the last line just

quoted. What did it matter to him, that he should suffer all the torture and bondage of human passion, so long as the goal was immortality!

La Ravine Saint-Gilles

Certain poems like *La Ravine Saint-Gilles* have given Leconte de Lisle the reputation of being "un poète difficile," in other words obscure. Even this poem, however, when taken in conjunction with his other nature poems, particularly *Ultra cœlos,* is less enigmatical than is generally supposed.

The description of the tropical landscape, the exuberance of which contrasts so sharply with the peaceful darkness of the deep ravine, has been universally admired. Its vividness is unsurpassed. And what is its significance? It is a vision in which it seems as though one were penetrating the very heart of nature, surprising her great secret. On the surface all is movement and seeming joy or sorrow: the smiling dawns, and the wild screaming of the tempest. In reality, back of this apparent feeling is a vast indifference, an Olympian serenity, which the poet seems to have discovered on entering the quiet recesses of the gorge.

It is this god-like impassibility which the poet longs for.

> Heureux qui porte en soi, d'indifférence empli,
> Un impassible cœur sourd aux rumeurs humaines,
> Un gouffre inviolé de silence et d'oubli!

It is the craving for release from his passions: from love, and even more from the tortures of unfulfilled ambition, which we have seen expressed again and again in his work.

And yet, just as a gleam of blue is visible in the Ravine, there is still a gleam of hope which penetrates the somber

refuge of asceticism and the nirvana which nature offers. Life has lost its attraction for the sorrow-stricken spirit:

La vie a beau frémir autour de ce cœur morne . . .

And yet the inner urge of hope is irresistible. It calls him back into the tumult of life.

Qui l'éveille en sa tombe et le convie ailleurs.

The last line is like the despairing cry at the close of *Ultra cœlos.*

Vivons, puisque on ne peut oublier ni mourir!

A mystic interpretation to the poem is possible however. It may be that the poet intentionally left the final stanza somewhat vague. One of the charms of great works is that we may read into them the thoughts and emotions which we ourselves most cherish, and of which we stand most in need.

CHAPTER IV

POEMS OF COMBAT

I imagine that some of the very same critics who accused Leconte de Lisle of being cold secretly felt indignant at the warmth of his attacks on certain of our religious beliefs and practices. Pugnacity and anger were strong in him, and the Church and mediaeval Feudalism drew them out. His bitterness has often been condemned. That is quite to be expected; but it has nothing to do with the faults or excellencies of his poems as such. There is much to be said for the Jesuits in their quarrel with the Jansenists, for example, but that does not prevent Pascal's *Lettres Provinciales* from being a masterpiece of satire. Did Carducci fail to appreciate the beauty of Dante's poetry because he hated Dante's political and religious views?

> While Church and Empire sadly ruined lie,
> Your singing soars above them to the sky:
> Though Jove is dead the poet's hymn remains.

Poetic appreciation is largely independent of the truth or falsity of a dogma or political view.

The satires of Leconte de Lisle against the Church should be regarded from the same literary standpoint as are Hugo's Odes against Napoleon III. It is not necessary to have a personal grudge against Louis Napoleon to feel the beauty and the weight of the irony in *Les Châtiments.*

The interest of satire lies partly in the wit, partly in the *katharsis* which the expression of any strong emotion will give. In addition, since it is largely an expression of pugnacity and anger, it gives us an opportunity to exercise, ideally, psychological functions which are definitely anti-social, and need to be suppressed under ordinary conditions. The instinct that makes men fight is implanted in every one of us, and will continue to be so, as long as we remain human. But substitutes for war should and may be found. Thus satire, in addition to its other functions, may help to take the place of fighting.

Le Corbeau

Leconte de Lisle had a vein of caustic wit which he exploited in intimate circles, but which rarely appears in his verse. He knew that wit is the enemy of feeling, as Bergson has clearly pointed out in his book on *Laughter,* and he had no need of it, as Heine had, to correct a tendency to sentimentality. *Le Corbeau,* however, is an exception. It is an example of grim humor à la Swift, and of Voltairean wit. The poet was not a Celt and a Frenchman for nothing. One is reminded of *L'Île des Pingouins* by Anatole France, who once frequented our poet's literary group.

The raven of the poem is a large bird, as old as time; and has the gift of speech, for (as a Gypsy solemnly told me the other day in relating an ancient folk tale) "In those days the birds could talk." The raven comes to a monastery and promises certain aid to the Abbot, and asks for absolution in return.

The Raven is puzzled by a question of theology—the existence of the soul. He remarks: "I was wondering

what souls are made of. I was acquainted with all the ancient prophets, in their day, and they certainly did not know." And as for the ancient kings, who died in uncertainty, "I have eaten many of them—soul and all." He is referring here to the strange fact that the immortality of the soul is scarcely mentioned in the Old Testament.

He was one of the fortunate creatures saved from the Deluge by the Ark. And what a feast of human flesh was provided for him! The description of the land as the waters receded is extremely realistic and vivid. He sees the bodies of two lovers, and even *his* ghoulish heart is touched by the beauty of these two: the man with a look of unvanquished courage, in his rigid, upright attitude, pressing a woman to his breast with his strong arms, while her large eyes and smiling lips even in death still retain the look of happiness with which she died, encircled by his arms. The contrast between this human beauty and the ugliness of God's world covered with the slime and mud left by the receding waters is striking in its suggestive irony.

Following the flood came terrible wars: "Women and old men bleeding in the dust, and little children crushed upon the stones; showing how the waters of the recent Deluge had purified the new born world!"

Ivres de leur fureur, œil pour œil, dent pour dent,
Avec l'âpre sanglot des étreintes mortelles,
Jours et nuits heurtaient les nations nouvelles.
Les traits sifflaient au loin, les masses aux nœuds durs
Brisaient les fronts guerriers ainsi que des fruits mûrs;
Les femmes, les vieillards sanglants dans la poussière,
Et les petits enfants écrasés sur la pierre,
Attestaient que les flots du Déluge récent
Avaient purifié le monde renaissant!

As the Raven remarked: the Flood was a boon to *him* personally, but he could not understand why there should still be wickedness on the Earth, when it was with the intention of killing all the wicked that God had slain men and women, the aged and the children, the guilty and the innocent, in the Deluge. There is a marvelous picture of the lapse of time, as the Raven passes in review the races and civilizations that have thrived and perished, until even the meaning of their words carved in granite is forgotten. The gods have shared the same fate as man. Thousands have been born and died, "adored and hated, and sure of being immortal!"

De siècle en siècle éclos, j'ai vu naître des Dieux,
Et j'en ai vu mourir. Les mers, les monts, les plaines
En versaient par milliers aux visions humaines;
Ils se multipliaient dans la flamme et dans l'air,
Les uns armés du glaive et d'autres de l'éclair,
Jeunes et vieux, cruels, indulgents, beaux, horribles;
Faits de marbre ou d'ivoire, et tantôt invisibles,
Adorés et haïs, et surs d'être immortels!

Those were the happy years, filled with the clamor of wars, when the Raven would say to himself: "If all things die, it is so that I may live." One is reminded of Voltaire's attacks on the idea of Providence. If there is a special Providence that acts independently of man's efforts, and presides over wars, it would seem to be a Providence of the ravens, as much if not more than of Man.

The Abbot rebukes the Raven for his horrible desires. But are they not natural for him, he replies? "Being only a bit of flesh without a soul I can merit neither praise nor blame." The Raven is something of a theologian.

One day in the time of Tiberius, in quest of carrion, he came to a hill where three men were hanging from crosses, on which they were being tortured to death. Nothing could be more horrible than the situation, as the Raven flies toward the central figure to satisfy its hunger. Only a miracle prevents it from plunging its beak into his flesh. The vision of Christ is very beautiful. There is nothing surprising nor inconsistent in the fact that the poet should have had a deep veneration for the humble workman of Galilee, who scourged the formally religious and the avaricious of his day, and was persecuted by Church and State. Christ has always been dear to the radical heart. How could a picture of Christ, the man, be more sympathetic than that given us by Renan?

An angel drives the Raven away before it can partake of his flesh, and condemns it to a long fast. But where is the justice in that, complains the Raven. Eating is an old habit, hard to break. There is a hint also that Communion is nothing more nor less than eating Christ's flesh. Is this not symbolic of the fact that the Middle Ages, the most "Christian" of periods, should have showed so little brotherly love and should have oppressed the humble so woefully?

The Abbot absolves the Raven. The bird falls dead, just at the time when his period of fasting had expired, and new wars were breaking out and the rivers were filled with corpses.

La Bête Écarlate

Nowhere does Leconte de Lisle's anger reach a higher pitch than in *The Scarlet Beast*. It is a great poem, for the same reason that Hugo's *L'Expiation* is a great poem. In fact I consider it a greater poem than the other, not

only in that the Church is greater and more important than Napoleon III and the Second Empire, but chiefly because the passion of the former poet is deeper and less personal.

Christ is meditating on the Mount of Olives. On that tragic occasion he has a prophetic vision of the future. He sees the anchorites and flagellants in filth and rags, torturing their flesh with lascivious pleasure, "blaspheming the light and cursing beauty."

Next he sees, rising amid the ruins of seven hills, a scarlet beast with claws and tentacles, with a thousand maws that reach out over land and sea. It is a grandiose vision, such as one finds only in the poetry of Hugo, Milton, or Dante. *Les Tragiques* by D'Aubigné seems pale in comparison. The agony of Christ on the cross would be nothing compared to his mental anguish could he have seen the massacre of Saint Bartholomew's day, and the tortures of the Albigensians, torn limb from limb; or could he have seen the flesh of those who tried to follow him more closely, seared with flame. And as though this Hell on Earth were not enough, there must needs be a place of eternal torture, where children are punished for faults that were not their own.

And all these horrors committed in the name of Christianity! Awakening from this vision, in which each one of the creatures crawling from the maws of the Beast cries out his name, he falls to the ground with a deep sigh and, despairing of the world, longs to die.

And nearby, outside the high and somber walls of Zion, the torch of Judas flickers in the darkness.

. . . Et l'homme,
S'abattant contre terre avec un grand soupir,
Désespéra du monde, et désira mourir.

Et, non loin, hors des murs de Tsion haute et sombre,
La torche de Judas étincela dans l'ombre!

In *Le Mont des Oliviers,* de Vigny used this picture of the torch of Judas. But it lacks the significance that it has in *La Bête Écarlate,* where it symbolizes the betrayal of Christ by his followers to come.

To Christ, gentle as he was, denouncing avarice and all religion which was merely a question of form, what a tremendous irony the dogma and practice of the mediaeval Church would have seemed! Also, could Christ, who loved little children and all those who were suffering and oppressed, rejoice with the blessed in Heaven at the tortures of the damned?

CHAPTER V

POEMS OF DISILLUSION

Perhaps the most characteristic of Leconte de Lisle's poems are those which voice his sadness, his pessimism. As we have seen in the study of his life and times, his sadness was partly the result of personal misfortunes, but principally the result of his contemplation of the world and society—a cosmic sorrow.

Dies Irae

Placed at the close of the first volume of the definitive editions of his works, *Poems of Antiquity,* this particular poem, *Dies Irae,* helps us to understand the rest. It shows us the aspirations of the poet in his youth, his Rousseauistic rapture as he lost himself in the beauty of Nature, his joy in the spiritual enthusiasms of the past, and his longing for an all-embracing Love, a Universal Liberty.

Life did not fulfill those wonderful promises. He is weary of waiting for the God who will not come, and turns his eyes toward the past, and listens to the sacred voice of memory. Before him lie "the blue Seas, resounding as in song along the shores, rolling endlessly away toward the divine unknown."

He blends his memories of youth with dreams of a Young Humanity. The world seemed imperishable, eternal; heaven seemed near; all his ideals were intact. What wonderful things the poet felt he could accomplish for

humanity in the great world, as yet unexplored! Meantime he lived in an island paradise, intoxicated with the beauty of his natural surroundings.

Dans la beauté du monde il vivait fortement.

Then came the disappointments. And the Universe appeared old, and seemed to have lost its power to dream. The ancient prophets of Biblical days had passed away forever. No one would hear again in the voice of the wind, the communion of Earth and Heaven. Vishnu would never again be found by Hindu mystics. Harmonious Hellas lay dead, and Christ, the last God, had cried out in sorrow for the last time. Alas for those who are consumed with longing, and whose belief and love will be unanswered! Will the future restore life? Will the past restore love?

Mais nous, nous, consumés d'une impossible envie,
En proie au mal de croire et d'aimer sans retour,
Répondez, jours nouveaux! nous rendrez-vous la vie?
Dites, ô jours anciens! nous rendrez-vous l'amour?

And worst of all, poetry is scorned by the crowd. In his despair the poet cries out to Nature, who filled his youth with serene ecstasy, to carry him to unknown gods. But if all his dreams are merely the vain shadow of his own desire, impossible to grasp, Death at least is real, and Death can bring oblivion.

Et toi, divine Mort, ou tout rentre et s'éffface,
Accueille tes enfants dans ton sein étoilé;
Affranchis-nous du temps, du nombre et de l'espace,
Et rends-nous le repos que la vie a troublé:

The intensity with which the poet loved his youthful dreams, and the complete reversal of all his most cher-

ished hopes, make the reader feel the depth of his disillusionment, and the poignancy of his sorrow, which sees in death a haven of relief.

In other poems he succeeds in rendering more vividly his love of nature, his religious or humanitarian aspirations, his cult of beauty, or his longing for death. But *Dies Irae* is interesting because of its completeness, and the light it sheds on other poems.

It has been said that one may judge of the greatness of a poet by the way in which he handles the great universal themes such as love, nature, and death. France has had greater love poets, but only one nature poet who can rival him, Rousseau, whose poetic prose is the fountain head of nature poetry. Leconte de Lisle in his treatment of death is incomparable. Here too he has only one rival, who, like Rousseau, is a prose writer, Bossuet. Villon it is true has sung of death with brutal power, especially in Stanzas XXXVIII to XLI of the *Great Testament.*

> La mort le faict fremir, pallir,
> Le nez courber, les veines tendre,
> Le col enfler, la chair mollir,
> Joinctes et nerfs croistre et estendre.
> Corps feminin, qui tant est tendre,
> Poly, souef, si precieulx,
> Te faudra-il ces maulx attendre?
> Ouy, ou tout vif aller és cieulx.

Here in Villon is a point of view that is distinctly mediaeval. It expresses the physical horror of death, rather than death itself. It is a viewpoint that has its supernatural outlook, to be sure, but the stress is laid on the material aspects of death. Villon's famous Ballad of the

Dames du Temps Jadis, on the other hand, is an expression of the transitory character of all things, the sadness of the "flux."

To find an expression of Death itself, so to speak, in its human and spiritual aspects, one must turn to some of the Greek poets, to Lucretius, or to Shakespeare; and none have sung the beauty of death with greater depth of feeling than Leconte de Lisle. Dante has sung of it more sweetly, in *La Vita Nuova,* Canzone III.

> E spesse fiate pensando a la morte,
> vènemene un disio tanto soave
> che mi tramuta lo color nel viso.

But it is a transitory and incidental feeling that leaves no firm impression.

L'Illusion Suprême

As in *Dies Irae,* the poet is thinking of his youth, his dreams, and the disappointments which their unfulfillment brought him. Close to death, the sleep that knows no dawn, sealed with a seal that neither God nor man can break, inevitable for all, since even the gods die, he sees again the visions which haunted his childhood.

> Celui qui va goûter le sommeil sans aurore
> Dont l'homme ni le Dieu n'ont pu rompre le sceau,
> Chair qui va disparaître, âme qui s'évapore,
> S'emplit des visions qui hantaient son berceau.

The beauty of l'Île Bourbon rises before our eyes, as it did before his, further beautified by the selective processes of memory and art, but with all the vividness of reality: the sweet, sad chant of the slaves, the sonorous murmur of the sea, the thousand odors of the tropical foliage, with the movement of the native boats and the darting of

birds, a landscape as colorful as a painting, but appealing through the senses to every form of the imagination.

He sees another vision, the vision of his first love, immortally young. She too will disappear when the poet's memory of her dissolves in death, with all the dreams of youth, his love, his joy, the songs of the sea and forest, and the winds of heaven, that seemed to sweep away his wildest hopes. With the poet's death, all that was so dear and meant so much will vanish. What does it all amount to, if it is not eternal, he cries?

> Ah! tout cela, jeunesse, amour, joie et pensée,
> Chants de la mer et des forêts, souffles du ciel
> Emportant à plein vol l'Espérance insensée,
> Qu'est-ce que tout cela, qui n'est pas éternel?
>
> Soit! la poussière humaine, en proie au temps rapide,
> Ses voluptés, ses pleurs, ses combats, ses remords,
> Les Dieux qu'elle a conçus et l'univers stupide
> Ne valent pas la paix impassible des morts.

The longing for eternity is one of the most fundamental human desires, and appears continually, not only in the beliefs of primitive man, but in any number of metaphysical systems and theologies. In Leconte de Lisle the longing is particularly strong. His intelligence, however, will not allow him to believe in it; and in addition to the many disappointments of his life, this is one of the chief sources of his despair.

> Qu'est-ce que tout cela, qui n'est pas éternel?

It is the despairing cry of our deepest aspiration. It is one of the great lines in literature, striking the imagination of all men with its inevitability and its measureless sweep. It is the essence of life's tragedy.

Leconte de Lisle is by temperament one of those whose watchword is "All or nothing!" Only the absolute will satisfy him. If life eternal is denied, there remains at least one thing which is irrevocable and unchanging—the negation of life—death absolute and everlasting. How deeply his invocation to death affects us, coming as it does from one who has felt and made us feel the wonderful beauty of the world.

MILLE ANS APRÈS

Landscapes instead of "being a mood" are rather the *reflections* of our changing moods. To one person the same scene may express an entirely different feeling from that imparted to another, or it may suggest quite the opposite mood to the same person, under new circumstances. When Baudelaire says in *La Musique:*

> . . . calme plat, grand miroir
> De mon désespoir!

he makes a true comparison in speaking of the calm sea as a *mirror* of his despair. On the other hand, one who approached the calm ocean in a mood of quiet peace might find his happiness reflected in the tranquil waters.

L'Île Bourbon, like other tropical islands, is swept from time to time by fierce hurricanes. Knowing them as he did and having the marvelous power of description that we have already noted, he has given us in three stanzas all the savage grandeur of the scene. But Leconte de Lisle is something more than a mere descriptive poet. In the next three stanzas he gives us the wild joy of youth, intoxicated with the mad voice of the wind, that seems to herald future triumphs. Perhaps he is in love. At least he is in love with life; and, as he stands there dominating the storm that seems to wrap the very mountain

in terror, as the huge white waves leap against the cliffs, and the peaks are lost in the swirling darkness, all the force of the hurricane is his, and he loses himself in the wonder of it all.

> Et j'écoutais, ravi, ces voix désespérées.
> Vos divines chansons vibraient dans l'air sonore,
> O jeunesse, ô désirs, ô visions sacrées,
> Comme un chœur de clairons éclatant à l'aurore!

But now as he looks back on his youth, it all seems so long ago, as though a thousand years had passed; everything is so changed. As we know, love and passion had lied to him, and his dreams of glory had proved empty. And now, as he hears again in memory the voice of the hurricane, he only feels the terror of the scene, the wild sobbing of the storm.

> Et l'écroulement sourd des ombres furieuses.

No translation can do justice to the suggestive power of the last line. It is vague, but not meaningless, and plays upon the imagination, prolonging the sensation of despair, haunting the brain long after the words are ended.

> Voici qu'après mille ans, seul, à travers les âges,
> Je retourne, ô terreur! à ces heures joyeuses,
> Et je n'entends plus rien que les sanglots sauvages
> Et l'écroulement sourd des ombres furieuses.

Les Hurleurs [1]

Frequently cited by various critics, this poem is given by Brunetière as an example of the poet's "Naturalism," or "scientific realism," a literary doctrine already stated

[1] Poem and translation, pp. 234, 235.

by Hugo when he declared that everything which is in Nature belongs in Art. In this latter sense I believe the poem might be labelled "naturalistic"; but I do not believe that the poet was inspired by any scientific, evolutionary doctrines as to the common origin of the lower animals and man, as Brunetière suggests. He was not thinking of the dog as an "inferior brother of humanity."

It is one of the few poems with a decidedly subjective tone, and was doubtless inspired by an actual scene, witnessed near Cape Town, on his way to France the second time.

In a mood of despair he recalls the lugubrious vision, which stamped itself so strongly on his memory that after all those years he still can see the gruesome image of the dogs on the lonely African beach lighted by fitful gleams of moonlight, and he still can hear, above the moaning of the sea, the melancholy howling as it rises through the night.

We all know the mixture of terror and the wild sadness this sound evokes at times. Primarily, the poem is an expression of anguish, of fierce grief: one of the most poignant of the many such expressions in his works.

La Chute des Étoiles

The longing to forget is one of the commonest of lyric moods. There is an old French song:

> Tu m'aimais, je sais cela;
> Tu ne m'aimais plus, je sais cela.
> Mais l'oubli, l'oubli!
> Je ne sais pas cela.

This song gives the feeling in its simplest terms, but none the less effectively.

Leconte de Lisle has expressed this sentiment in a number of poems with more directness and power than in *La Chute des étoiles,* but never with more haunting suggestiveness. The lines are pure music.

It is the twilight mood. The stars are fading from the sky. With joyous radiance the earth is waking to life; but the poet is unmoved by the laughter of the dawn. His thoughts follow the stars as they sink below the horizon: the stars that reflect the sadness of the night, the stars that are vanishing in the sea of forgetfulness. If only he might follow them!

> Heureux qui vous suit, clartés mornes,
> O lampes qui versez l'oubli!
> Comme vous, dans l'ombre sans bornes,
> Heureux qui roule enseveli!
> Celui-là vers la paix s'élance:
> Haine, amour, larmes, violence,
> Ce qui fut l'homme est aboli.
> Donnez-nous l'éternel silence,
> O lampes qui versez l'oubli!

One is reminded of the lament of Job, crying out his sorrows:

> Let the stars of the twilight thereof be dark:
> Let it look for the light, but have none;
> Neither let it behold the eyelids of the morning.

Nox

The beauty of *Nox* is so simple and evident as hardly to need comment. It is the same longing for the peace of darkness. The opening lines recall Goethe's *Wanderers Nachtlied,* that marvel of simplicity.

Über allen Gipfeln
Ist Ruh,
In allen Wipfeln
Spürest du
Kaum einen Hauch.
Die Vögel schweigen im Walde.
Warte nur: balde
Ruhest du auch.

An element of originality is introduced by Leconte de Lisle in the indication of *katharsis*. The vague melancholy of the scene, the plaintive murmur of the sea and the forest are like an answering voice, or like the poet's own song, purging his spirit of sorrow. And so perfect is the expression of his mood by the surroundings, that after many years the mere memory of the scene brings consolation.

Ô mers, ô bois songeurs, voix pieuses du monde,
Vous m'avez répondu durant mes jours mauvais;
Vous avez apaisé ma tristesse inféconde,
Et dans mon cœur aussi vous chantez à jamais!

Dans Le Ciel Clair [2]

The theme of this poem is one of the oldest in the world—the sadness of the "flux." It is a companion piece to Lamartine's *Le Lac*.

O temps, suspends ton vol! et vous, heures propices,
Suspendez votre cours!
Laissez-nous savourer les rapides délices
Des plus beaux de nos jours!

What the older poet has rendered explicit in the preceding lines, Leconte de Lisle has simply suggested.

[2] Poem and translation, pp. 196, 197.

The morning landscape, described with marvelous delicacy, itself suggests the dreamy ecstacy of the lovers, so that a single line is sufficient to make us feel it with intensity.

One of the most musical of his poems, one in which every possible effect of repetition has been utilized, —the melody itself lulls us with a sensuous caress. We scarcely need to be told that:

La volupté d'aimer clôt à demi leurs yeux . . .

The magic of the rhythm makes us dream deliciously, oblivious of time.

Then comes the sudden awakening. The poet has only to mention the fact that although

L'aube fleurit toujours comme un divin rosier;

the moment which seemed to the lovers to be eternal will never return.

Dans le ciel clair is not one of the most original of the poems by Leconte de Lisle, but it affords a means of comparison with the poetry of other schools. Less rhetorical than the poems of the Romanticists on the same theme, and more articulate than those of the Symbolists, its simple suggestiveness will appeal to men until the day when we shall have found the fountain of everlasting youth.

CHAPTER VI

POEMS OF EXPERIENCE

Flaubert made the statement once, that for him a book was simply a means of living in a given environment. Every poem contains this element of life and experience just as well as every realistic novel. What a wonderful thing it is to be lifted out of ourselves and live the lives of thousands of other people, real or imaginary, great or humble, fellow townsmen or far off Hindus, contemporaries or persons of vanished ages. We may live their happiest moments or moments of terrible anguish, when the tide of their lives runs swiftest and strongest; and all the while we may be spared the actual sordidness and pain of such experiences.

Mere sharing of incident in the vicarious lives we thus may live will perhaps be satisfying, or perhaps may not. But if, in addition to incident, we may share their fundamental emotions, we shall readily enter into their lives, for the same instincts and emotions are a part of every man and woman, in fact of every higher animal. Experiences and ideas may be of every conceivable nature, continually changing; but our instincts remain the same, our potential emotions constitute our hold on eternity. Apparently fleeting, and evanescent, as they rise and fall within us, dependent on fresh experiences to call them forth, they are there in the depths of our being at all times.

I have already spoken of the longing of man for what is changeless, or eternal, and for immortality. The struggle for existence is rendered more difficult by the constant adaptations we must make to ever-changing surroundings, and so we long for changelessness. And since we are living beings with the love of life firmly implanted in us, we wish that life might go on forever. In general these fundamental ideals exist in the form of mere ideas, which compensate us for the hard facts of the everchanging flux, and the reality of death. But these ideals should be and sometimes are expressive of reality, workable ideals. In art we can attain a certain actual immortality. In re-creating the past, in living through others, we are for the moment, like the gods, eternal, immortal. Another fundamental ideal is the Oneness of things. In the race for life multiplicity baffles us. By nature we are all Monists. The mind is constantly reducing the complexities of the universe to unity. Art, too, is a unifier, and a means of establishing universal kinship and solidarity.

The Animal Poems

In penetrating the lives of the animals, as we do in the "animal poems" of Leconte de Lisle, we are in a sense re-living our past, remounting the course of time to ages incalculably distant. The theory of evolution gives an added significance to poems like *The Elephants,* but it does not explain their origin and chief value. We know from his letters that while still a youth Leconte de Lisle was deeply interested in animals, and had a certain aptitude for portraying them. Children especially are fond of animals. Why? Simply because certain *human* traits are to be found in animals, in a simple, intensified

form. Before the child's intellect is developed to a large extent, there is a closer kinship between him and the animals than between him and adults. But since the primary instincts and emotions which we share with the animals remain when childhood has passed, and constitute the most basic and constant part of us, no wonder that we never grow too old to enjoy a visit to the Zoo!

There is another reason why we are attracted to animals. Frequently they possess, to an extraordinary degree, external traits which we admire. Emerson has pointed out that it is impossible for a faun or a cat to be ungraceful. Similarly the impression of strength given by the elephant or the tiger is most striking. Many of the animals have come to be regularly used as symbols of appropriate qualities, mental as well as physical. Literature is full of comparisons which show how human traits are externalized and rendered more vivid in the animals. We enjoy them, too, for their great variety of color and line. As Professor Chinard asserts, it was through a study of Ornithology that a large color vocabulary, and to some extent a refinement of color sense was developed among French writers, and was passed on to the literary arts.

Animals always have been subjects for art and literature, in the Orient and Occident: in modern Japanese prints, in ancient Buddhist fables, and in the fables of La Fontaine and the well-known *Roman de Renart*. However, even La Fontaine, with his marvelously endowed poetic nature, failed to see all the beauty of animals in themselves. True to the traditions of his century he generalized and *humanized* them. The tendency since the classic period has been to *animalize* human be-

ings. Leconte de Lisle did neither. As we have seen, there is a great sufficiency of what is human, and harmonious with human needs, in the real beasts and birds.

Already the artistic possibilities of this genre had been developed by Barye (1795–1875), the matchless sculptor of animal life. Delacroix's tigers also give something of the appeal to the senses and the joy in power which we find in this field of art.

In this series of poems we find depicted the natural environment, which even more than in the case of man forms an integral part of every animal. In addition, the poet has enabled us to penetrate the beast's innermost nature, and share its feelings.

Les Éléphants

I doubt if any animal has stirred the imagination of man more than the elephant. He gives us an impression of quiet strength, of tremendous power lying dormant, in reserve. His resemblance to the mastodon recalls the prehistoric ages, and the elemental colossal forces evolving from the chaos.

In this poem the impression is reinforced by the immensity of the desert. We see the elephants growing larger and larger as they advance over the red sands. Their bodies are seamed and furrowed like giant tree trunks; their massive heads are like huge rocks.

What is it that guides their mighty footsteps over the undulating dunes? In the burning wastes they are dreaming of cool forests and rivers gleaming white in the moonlight, where casting great shadows they used to come to drink, crushing the reeds beneath their massive tread. Anyone who has watched a dog moving and barking in its sleep, knows that animals have dreams.

They doubtless are like the dreams of children—simple wish fulfillments for the most part.

> Aussi, pleins de courage et de lenteur ils passent
> Comme une ligne noire, au sable illimité;
> Et le désert reprend son immobilité
> Quand les lourds voyageurs à l'horizon s'éffacent.

There is something singularly appealing to the imagination in this picture of dreams pursued with calm, unswerving strength that nothing can disturb, in the midst of the "*néant,*" the emptiness of the lonely sands, boundless as the sea. It is not an allegory, in the sense that Bryant's *To A Wild Duck* is an allegory with a moral. But might it not be taken as a symbol of the genius, solitary, courageous, and strong amid the vanities of life, calmly pursuing dreams.

Le Sommeil du Condor [1]

In his *Studies in Literature,* Edward Dowden says of this poem: "No study of animal life is of more exciting strangeness and at the same time of more mysterious solemnity."

In his early poems, we observed a predilection on the part of Leconte de Lisle for the eagle, and for mountains. They seemed to externalize his dominant trait, pride. They give his spirit an opportunity to soar. His love of space and vastness is an eminent characteristic. In his later poems, we also find him again and again passionately crying out for repose. In *The Condor's Sleep* pride and repose are blended in a lofty vision of vastness. Even here, in this highly objective poem, this simple vision of reality, we find a "refraction" of the poet's temperament.

[1] Poem and translation, pp. 218, 219.

Fully to appreciate the sense of exhilaration which this poem gives, one should have ascended a high mountain. The dizzy slopes present a measure of space; and as one rises higher and higher the sense of power becomes intoxicating. I shall never forget the thrill of standing on the summit of the Weisshorn, with the Matterhorn and other giants of the Alps extending toward the limitless horizon like waves of a frozen sea.

In addition to the thrill of space which we get, as with the eyes of the imagination we behold the wide *pampas* and the ocean stretching out to infinity, rivaling in vastness the starry skies above, we get the feeling of power of the huge bird.

The description of night, advancing over the continent and rising from the dark gulfs below, also makes an impression of vastness and somber melancholy. But far above the volcanoes and their boiling lava, far above the winds themselves, the great bird reposing on outstretched wing, dominating the vast expanse and the rising tide of darkness, makes a supreme impression of serenity.

La Panthère Noire [2]

In addition to its strong appeal to the senses, the value of this poem lies in the feeling of vitality which it communicates. It palpitates with life, full of grace and color, ardent and beautiful. Opening with a description of the rosy dawn, it closes with a vision of intense light:

> Les bruits cessent, l'air brûle, et la lumière immense
> Endort le ciel et la forêt.

[2] Poem and translation, pp. 242, 243.

The passion of men of the South for sunlight is a distinguishing trait. Light in itself is an element of beauty. When one considers its pyscho-physical effects, the feeling of joy that a bright day gives after a succession of cloudy ones, one is not surprised that the sun should have been an object of religious veneration. Leconte de Lisle's love of light has already been pointed out. Brunetière says: "If Heredia's triumph is that of color,—perhaps that of Leconte de Lisle, his master, is rather that of light."

In addition to the light effects—in the sky, on the waves, and on the dewdrops in the trees—the poem is filled with color. Heredia is colorful, to be sure, but no more so than the older poet.

The leading motif is struck again, by the "flood of strong, sweet odors, feverishly voluptuous."

> Dans l'air tiède et subtil, brusquement dilaté,
> S'épanouit un flot d'odeurs fortes et douces,
> Plein de fièvre et de volupté.

And again:

> Les feuillages joyeux de leurs mille corbeilles
> Sur ses pas parfument le sol.

It is in the picture of the panther that the impression of power and grace is by a few strokes most definitely conveyed: its restlessness, the piercing quality of its glance, and the undulating manner of its walk. The Python too, uncoiling amid the scarlet flowers of the cactus, accentuates the same impression and adds to the undercurrent of horror suggested by the trail of warm red blood across the flowering moss.

In one of his books, James Stephens exhorts us to live to the depths of our natures as well as to the heights.

The sensuousness and primordial quality of the poem seem to answer this appeal. All our complex mental life begins in the senses and the instincts. It is refreshing to return and dip in the sources, to bathe in vitality.

Le Jaguar

Bergson's explanation of the value of tragedy, as the vicarious enjoyment of primitive impulses, is even more applicable to this series of poems, and particularly to *The Jaguar.* (*Le Rire,* pp. 162–4.) A mood of horror emerges from the dark, oppressive shadows of the distant mountains and from the slimy swamps, filled with alligators. The picture of the sinuous jaguar crouching along a tree trunk, reptile-like, ready to spring, is complete in every lineament. In every muscle we feel its lithe, savage strength. An atmosphere of sinister mystery pervades the scene.

The jaguar's full power and its fierce lust for blood are developed as it springs on the huge ox of the *pampas.* Clinging to its neck, it is carried over the dunes, through swamp and thicket, in the lurid moonlight. The ox, wild with pain, blinded with its own blood, plunges into the darkness and silence of the night, with the jaguar still riveted to its flesh.

Sur le sable mouvant qui s'amoncelle en dune,
De marais, de rochers, de buissons entravé,
Ils passent, aux lueurs blafardes de la lune,
L'un, ivre, aveugle, en sang, l'autre à sa chair rivé.

La Verandah [3]

Brunetière has an interesting interpretation of this poem in his essay on *Leconte de Lisle,* in which he sees in it something more than a mere description, "one of the most graceful and the most voluptuous ever caressed by a poet in his verse." In the feline, unreflecting beauty of the Persian, he sees the effect on women of three thousand years of oriental civilization. The picture is a summing up of what is most characteristic of the East: its sensuous luxury, its dreamy indolence. As Brunetière points out, even the music of the poem, with its subtle repetitions, intertwining like the scrolls of arabesques, produces a strikingly oriental effect.

It is certainly something to have conjured up the Orient in a few stanzas and made it *live* in a manner that science and history rarely attain. To be suddenly transported far away and into the past gives us the sense of extending and expanding our own lives. But the poem has another value. Living at a high nervous tension, amid the hurry and strain of modern life, there is nothing we need more than the art of relaxation. Asked by an Oriental what was the chief difference between New York and Bagdad, a New Yorker answered: "The hurry and bustle." "We tried that in Bagdad a thousand years ago," the Oriental replied, "and found it didn't pay."

It is a poem of pure music and sensation; every shadow of a thought slips away, and we abandon our-

[3] Poem and translation, pp. 246, 247.

selves to a sort of *dolce far niente,* which is not a colorless drowsiness, but a voluptuous feeling of "mute intoxication." All sense of effort is suspended, and we seem to float in a semi-rapturous languor, freed from the tyranny of consciousness.

From a purely technical standpoint, the poem is also extremely interesting. Notice how, in the first stanza especially, the frequent alliteration of *r, n, l,* and *m* give an impression of dull, far-away *murmuring* sounds. There are a number of imitative words: *tintement,* which seems to suggest, in itself, the tinkle of water splashing in a basin; *murmurer,* and the words *sifflant* and *bourdonnant,* which recall the buzz and hum of wasps. And is it fanciful to hear in *roucoulement* the cooing of doves? With his many repetitions, the poet aims at monotony in order to weave a hypnotic spell, soothing and lulling the mind, as the Hindu mystic repeats the magic syllable *Om* again and again, or the dervish turns and turns, to produce the trance. The music of the verse is indeed like that of the Orient, which may be monotonous, but which holds the initiated for hours in quiet ecstacy.

Médailles Antiques, and Études Latines

In addition to the Greek poems mentioned elsewhere, there are a large number that simply express the joy of living. The *Ancient Medallions* like many of the poems of the *Greek Anthology* are descriptions of works of art, but what they give us in addition to their plastic beauty is a sense of delight in some given moment, vanished forever, yet living in the work of the artist. Keats in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn* has offered us an insight into the kind of joy such works can give. Here

is true immortality. The moment, like the maiden in the verse, is imperishable:

> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!
> Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
> Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
> And, happy melodist, unwearièd,
> For ever piping songs for ever new;
> More happy love! more happy, happy love!
> For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,
> For ever panting, and for ever young;
> All breathing human passion far above. . . .

In these poems, as in the *Anacreontic Odes,* we revel in the gaiety of youth, and wine, and song, in a wholesome, out-of-door voluptuousness. Here we may plunge into the joy of pagan times, before the weariness of the flesh caused the peoples of antiquity to turn to Christianity for an expression of their *taedium vitae,* their longing to forget this world and all its allurements.

Like M. Bergeret, in France's *Mannequin d'Osier,* living amid the drab and the commonplace, we have only to turn to these visions of Antiquity to live again the delight of eternal youth and beauty, to gaze on the sweet limbs of sea-born Aphrodite rising from the silver foam.

CHAPTER VII

THE IDEAL

If Leconte de Lisle shows us the depths of human nature, the great mysterious life forces which we have in common with the animals, he also points to the heights, to what distinguishes us from the animals, to what is most essentially human—to the ideal. His poetry is like the volcanic mountains of the tropics. Far below the surface lies the boiling lava, the gigantic power that casts the huge cone skyward. Above the jungles at its base teeming with life, it towers serenely; it has found repose, crowned with snow and blue ice, reflecting the dazzling rays of sunlight or the pale glimmer of the stars.

The deep despair one finds expressed in so many of his poems has its source in the failure of his ideals, or in the lack of idealism on the part of the great mass of his contemporaries. The great tragedy of his own life was the unfulfillment of the most cherished dreams of his youth. We have seen the embodiment of this tragedy in poems like *L'Illusion Suprême.* In *L'Anathème,* and *Aux Modernes* his anger breaks forth against "the moderns" who have slain the gods, all but one, Moloch, the "golden-bellied idol." He pictures the modern man, with no deep passions and no dreams, and imagines him in the near future, wallowing in a heap of gold, and dying stupidly as he fills his pockets. *The Moderns* is not one of his best poems, but it expresses the feelings, in an exaggerated form, of a body

of the thinkers and artists ever since *money* became a magic word in the minds of the majority. Let it not be thought for a moment that this particular form of materialism is confined to the Western continent. It is world wide. Balzac, best of all, has written the epic of the struggle for wealth.

What he and many of his contemporaries failed to realize fully is that commercialism and industrialism are excellent and necessary things; and that it is simply their divorce from things of the spirit that reacts harmfully alike on manufacturer, laborer, and poet.

As we have seen in studying both the man and his poetry, he was a thoroughgoing idealist. His ideals were both compensatory and "expressive": a refuge from the harshness of reality, and a program for ameliorating it. Though he often sought to escape from life into the realms of art, he faced the facts with unflinching courage. We have seen how the idealism and the beautiful dreams of religion made a profound appeal to him; but he did not shut his eyes to the fact that the other-worldliness of religion has hampered man in his efforts to build the Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth. Our poet was something besides an esthete and contemplator. He never ceased striving to bring happiness to mankind. Though at times everything seemed dark to him, he kept to the end of his life his faith in science and in social progress.

> O liberté, justice, ô passion du beau,
> Dites-nous que votre heure est au bout de l'épreuve,
> Et que l'Amant divin promis à l'âme veuve
> Après trois jours sortira du tombeau!

When the posthumous verses of the *Passion* were published in the volume of *Last Poems*, there was some

talk of a "conversion" on the part of the poet. Others spoke of it as a mere literary "exercise." We know, however, that Leconte de Lisle, like Renan, felt a strong bond of sympathy for Christ, who symbolized to them what is "divine" in humanity and who stood for the coming of peace and happiness here on earth.

But the plastic quality of Greek mythology with its beautiful deities and expressive legends appealed most strongly to him, as it has to literary artists of every period. Greek civilization, with its organic integrity, its harmony of interests, business, government, religion and art interdependent and mutually sustaining, seemed to him the ideal civilization.

Leconte de Lisle's most original contribution, however, is his exposition of the ideals of Hinduism.

La Vision de Brahma

La Vision de Brahma is a poem with a profound appeal. It fills the senses, stirs the inmost wells of feeling, and lights the imagination with the glow of the ideal. It is like a burst of summer lightning above soft silhouettes, amid the fresh, moist scents of a June night.

It is a metaphysical poem; and none the less a pure work of art. It has been maintained (notably by Horace Kallen in lectures at the University of Wisconsin) that metaphysics is the art of arts. There is much to be said for this view. The artist who paints a landscape selects a little portion of nature, and gives us a representation of reality, reduced and simplified by the exigencies of his medium, and his special interests. The painting, if it be of value, will heighten and eliminate certain of the lines and colors of the actual

scene, and will express a mood. It will harmonize better with the human senses, and answer certain spiritual needs. In a word, it will be a humanized simplification of a portion of reality. A system of metaphysics is likewise a humanized simplification of reality. The medium, instead of being a series of lines and colors, is a series of ideas; and the subject instead of being a little corner of the world is the entire universe.

It makes no difference that the conscious object of the metaphysician was primarily utilitarian, any more than the fact that the object of the builders of the Parthenon was primarily religious. For us of to-day at least, the value of the latter is chiefly esthetic. And so it is with most systems of metaphysics. Failing to realize this artistic value, the philosophers spend their spare time in pulling apart one another's systems; and the "practical man" condemns philosophy root and branch.

However if there are few such systems on which one can act, there are worlds of beauty in all the chief "arrangements" of the world which artist-philosophers have handed down to us. What medium is more precious, more human than the medium of thought; what subject more grandiose than the mighty universe? If literature is the art of arts, no branch of literature should stand higher than the art of metaphysics.

It is also the most difficult of the arts: not so much because of the power of reasoning involved, as of the high degree of open-mindedness required in the comprehension of a system of thought alien to one's own. Every race has pictured the world in its own way. However, if one goes beneath the surface he will see that each system has answered the eternal questions in a way

that will satisfy the same eternal needs that lie deep in every human heart.

No people has been more metaphysical in its trend of thought than the Hindus. Brahmanism and Buddhism are the most metaphysical of religions. Whatever may be their practical value, esthetically they are invaluable.

When Leconte de Lisle first read his Hindu poems to a group of friends, the effect of their newness was to completely dumfound his audience. And even now they are not appreciated at their true worth. Perhaps in time however they will come to be regarded as his greatest contribution to poetry.

La Vision de Brahma is more than an exposition of Brahmanism in a condensed form. It is a living vision of the Cosmos. It is animated with the poet's own emotions and longings for a world of harmony. For us, as for him, it is a fulfillment of those longings.

Vianey has compared it (page 58) to *Le Mont des Oliviers* by Alfred de Vigny. In the latter poem, Christ questions God as to the reason for evil in the world. In the poem by Leconte de Lisle, Brahma, who is likewise a human incarnation of the divine, asks for light on the same problem. Here the analogy ceases. In de Vigny's poem God is silent; and the value of the poem lies in the splendid lyric outburst of revolt voiced by the poet. In *La Vision de Brahma,* on the other hand, the Divinity replies, solving the problem of evil, and presenting a series of ideals which are a series of compensations for what is lacking in the universe, yet most desirable from the point of view of man. Together with the esthetic value of these ideals, the poem also has a lyric value as an expression of mystic rapture at the vision of the great All.

In order to experience this emotion, it is not necessary to be a Hindu yogi or a medieval monk. An interesting book, *Cosmic Consciousness,* by Dr. Bucke (the friend of Walt Whitman), describes the trance-like rapture afforded him by the contemplation of the universe made possible by science and metaphysics.

Leconte de Lisle has represented Brahma speculating as to the origin and end of all things. He has a vision.

> Et son cœur sombre et froid se fondit en lumières.

The sudden warmth of feeling and burst of inner light are characteristic of every such experience. The vision is grandiose and all-embracing. As Dante saw God as a point of light in the amphitheatre of saints and angels rising about Him like the petals of a rose,

> Il vit Celui que nul n'a vu, l'Ame des âmes,
> Tel qu'un frais nymphéa dans une mer de flammes
> D'où l'Être en millions de formes ruisselait:

Here the situation is reversed. God is not the detached, almost geometric entity, appealing largely to the abstract power of reasoning, as in *The Divine Comedy,* but the cosmos itself, with its triple appeal to the senses, the emotions, and the mind. Hâri is a pantheistic god, embracing all things. Only an imagination filled with the luxuriant visions of the tropics could suggest the teeming wealth and dazzling splendor of the spectacle.

The great forests are a part of Hâri. The worlds circling in their orbits are an emanation of the all-including deity.

> Son souffle égal et pur faisait rouler les mondes
> Qui jaillisaient de lui pour s'y replonger tous.

This conception of the Supreme Being as identical with the universe, is an ideal which satisfies our primordial craving for the unity of all things, and for the spirituality of the world. It is not an ideal on which one could act, but an ideal in which we rest, a thing of beauty, reducing the baffling complexity of the world about us to a state of harmony, and compelling the imagination to lofty flights.

Another attribute of Hâri is his immobility, his serenity.

> Et, dans la bienheureuse et sainte Inaction,
> Il se réjouissait de sa perfection,
> Immobile, les yeux resplendissants, mais calmes.

Hâri being all things, cannot want for anything. We can desire only what we do not possess. Action, when not meaningless, is for the purpose of attaining something. Divinity in so far as it is perfect, in the sense of absolute or complete, can want for nothing. Therefore the supreme attribute of Hâri is immobility—repose. Man is imperfect, but in contemplation he may for the moment approximate himself ideally to God. This is the origin of the idea of *nirvana*. It is not a vacuum, an absence, but an attainment of all things.

That this ideal should be prevalent in India is not surprising. India is a country where nature is lavish and profuse in its stimulation of the senses and desires. Practically, in the world of action the problem would be to harmonize and attain these various desires. Ideally these desires may be satisfied by contemplation, the merging of self with Divinity.

> Oh! qu'il était aimable à voir, l'Être parfait,
> Le Dieu jeune, embelli d'inexprimables charmes,
> Celui qui ne connaît les désirs ni les larmes,
> Par qui l'Insatiable est enfin satisfait!

What stands out chiefly in the vision of God is the eyes.

> Abîmes de repos et de sérénité.

One of the most striking paintings by the artist Gustave Moreau is one inspired by Hindu mythology, perhaps by this very poem. The colossal God is surrounded by a host of tiny figures, each engaged in fixed contemplation; but it is the eyes of the great Divinity which catch the attention—the large eyes, staring into space.

> Comme deux océans, troubles pour les profanes,
> Mais, pour les cœurs pieux, miroirs de pureté.

To the initiated absorbed in God, the world will be serene.

Freud and his disciples have shown us how our desires automatically receive a certain satisfaction through symbolic imaging in dreams. Here we have an analogous phenomenon. All our desires are merged and satisfied in the symbol of the One.

Hâri is surrounded by all that is loveliest and most desirable—reflections of the God.

> Mille vierges, au fond de l'étang circulaire
> Semblaient, à travers l'onde inviolée et claire
> Des colombes d'argent dans un nid de cristal.

The picture is of exquisite charm. What a contrast to the image of the giant, Siva!

> L'œil creux, triste, affamé, grinçant de ses dents blanches,
> Broyait et dévorait l'Univers palpitant.

Destruction is as necessary as creation; and perfection consists in absolute completeness. The hurricane, the jungle with its tigers and pythons, the thousand cities,

mingling tears and laughter, are as much a part of the all embracing God, as sunlight and smiling lakes. Certainly in the individual the combative instinct is an integral part; and the desire to tear and rend is frequently suppressed into the realms of the unconscious, where it too clamors for ideal expression.

As Brahma gazes on Hâri he merges himself with the Divinity; his sentiment of elation, the expanding of self to include all things, produces an exaltation of cosmic grandeur. Leconte de Lisle has described with marvelous intuition and feeling the rapture of the mystic who attains the trance and sees God.

Mais Brahma, dès qu'il vit l'Être-principe en face,
Sentit comme une force irrésistible en lui,
Et la concavité de son crâne ébloui
Reculer, se distendre, et contenir l'espace.

Les constellations jaillirent de ses yeux;
Son souffle condensa le monceau des nuées;
Il entendit monter les sèves déchaînées
Et croître dans son sein l'Océan furieux.

Sagesse et passions, vertus, vices des hommes,
Désirs, haines, amours, maux et félicité,
Tout rugit et chanta dans son cœur agité:
Il ne dit plus: Je suis! mais il pensa: Nous sommes!

Ainsi, devant le Roi des monts Kalatçalas,
Qui fait s'épanouir les mondes sur sa tige,
Brahma crut, dilaté par l'immense vertige,
Que son cerveau divin se brisait en éclats.

There is something of this in the intoxication of looking on the world from the summit of a lofty mountain. One seems to merge one's whole self into space.

In fact Hindu mystics have frequently ascended the Himalayas and gazed on the vastness below, to use the thrill of grandeur thus obtained as a step toward the final ecstasy of merging self with the Cosmos.

Brahma has not obtained complete serenity however. He is still baffled by the problem of evil, with which mankind has struggled since the days of the first "thinker." If God is good and all powerful, why should he permit evil? The answer of the Divinity is awaited with suspense. The poet prepares an atmosphere of awe, in which we listen to the Voice.

> Ce n'était point un bruit humain, un son pareil
> Au retentissement de la foudre ou des vagues;
> Mais plutôt ces rumeurs magnifiques et vagues
> Qui circulent en vous, mystères du sommeil!

Hâri replies that the only reality consists in eternity, immutability, repose.

> Car ma seule Inertie est la source de l'Être:

This line, which at first sight appears obscure and enigmatic, means simply that the supreme attribute of God is changelessness, repose. Being, Inactivity, Eternity, and Divinity are thus synonymous.

> Mais rien n'a de substance et de réalité,
> Rien n'est vrai que l'unique et morne Éternité:

Furthermore, the world is Hâri's dream. Motionless, immutable himself, he contemplates the prism of appearances, the world of change, and of action.

> J'ai mis mon Énergie au sein des Apparences,
> Et durant mon repos j'ai songé l'Univers.

This view is not very different from the usual idealist position in metaphysics, which regards the universe as idea, as the thought of God.

It is a view which satisfies the universal craving for a living world of spirit, as contrasted with a world of dead matter. It gives us a world in which man, who is essentially a living, thinking organism can feel at home. Also it consoles us for the presence, or rather, according to this view, the semblance of evil.

> O Brahma! toute chose est le rêve d'un rêve.

Evil like all else here below is merely a dream. We are surrounded by a network of illusion, Mâyâ.

> C'est Elle qui s'incarne en ses formes diverses,
> Esprits et corps, ciel pur, monts et flots orageux,
> Et qui mêle, toujours impassible en ses jeux,
> Aux sereines vertus les passions perverses.

Passions, sorrow, and sin result from wishing something beyond oneself.

> Les noires passions sont distinctes en moi.

They are a part; not the whole. Virtue is a renunciation of desire, a union with the Cosmos, with God. Beyond the Cosmos there is nothing. As Hâri says:

> Toute vertu se fond dans ma béatitude . . .

God and beatitude are One.

Midi [1]

Midi is the best known of all Leconte de Lisle's poems. It rather annoyed him to hear it coupled with his name again and again, as though it were the one poem of worth that he had written. "*Midi* is my *Vase Brisé*," he once remarked, referring to the poem constantly associated with the name of Sully-Prudhomme. If not his best, certainly it is a beautiful poem.

[1] Poem and translation, pp. 254, 255.

In concise, vigorous style, easily intelligible to the average reader, *Midi* sums up the poet's ideal of serenity, and his attitude toward Nature.

In *La Fontaine aux lianes* the last stanza clearly states this attitude:

> La nature se rit des souffrances humaines;
> Ne contemplant jamais que sa propre grandeur,
> Elle dispense à tous ses forces souveraines
> Et garde pour sa part le calme et la splendeur.

To some people there is a certain comfort in imagining that Nature sympathizes with their moods: that she is sad when they are sad, angry when they are angry, and that she delights in their joy. It is the "pathetic fallacy."

To Leconte de Lisle it is not the apparent sympathy of Nature that consoles, but rather her vast indifference, her mighty calm, her high serenity.

We find expressed here the same feeling which lies at the base of the longing for *Nirvana* on the part of the followers of Buddha. It is significant that to express "le néant divin" the poet has chosen a landscape which suggests fecundity and life: the blazing sun, the wide wheat field, and the heavy oxen. The longing for calm is that of a man who has been torn with passions, a man whose sorrows rise from an excess of vitality and feeling, rather than from a lack of it. He has chosen a moment of peace and calm to express what he lacks, and therefore longs for most—serenity, *Nirvana.* Intense sunlight combines the two: tranquillity and dormant passion.

It is not a mere negative oblivion, but rather an ecstasy in which one loses consciousness of everything about him. It is like the intellectual love of God, of

which Spinoza speaks in his *Ethics*. There is a direct intuition of the essence of things, of what is relatively unchanging and eternal, in which all sense of change and of time is lost, in which all our passions melt away. It is then that we are god-like. For to God there is no yesterday, no to-day, no to-morrow. There is no memory of the past, since past and future are as one. It is the oblivion that rises from the contemplation of the essential, the unchanging; it is the divine tranquillity of God.

Le Secret de la Vie

Life's Secret is a philosophical poem that haunts one with the mystery of its lines. Death, the poet tells us, is meaningless apart from life.

Ce qui n'est plus n'est tel que pour avoir été . . .

Nothingness is the cessation of being. It is only what has existed that can cease to exist. Similarly, being, or reality, he tells us, is meaningless apart from non-being.

Life is continuously changing. It is unstable. At each moment we have become different from what we were the moment before. Life is therefore inscrutable. Death alone is changeless, eternal. The secret of existence lies beyond the tomb.

In addition, he tells us that the outer world, the Universe, is illusion, the Mâyâ of Hindu metaphysics, the unsubstantial appearance, the mere *Idea* of the Idealistic philosophers. And finally, the poet exhorts mankind to seek beyond the mysterious eddyings of Illusion and the vain appearances of things, which form an ever-changing flow of visions, the unchanging state

of non-existence. Know how to die, he says, in order to have existed, since reality has no meaning apart from death.

> Et hors du tourbillon mystérieux des choses,
> Cherche au fond de la tombe, en sa réalité,
> Le secret de la vie.

It is a statement in concise form of one of the most persistent positions of metaphysics. It is vague to be sure, as the abstract thinking and feeling of metaphysics always is. Its vagueness is an answer to those who claim that Leconte de Lisle's poetry is too precise, too clear. It is suggestive, and full of mystery. The poem tempts the mind to go on musing over the strange enigma of existence.

This poem, like *La Maya* and the closing stanzas of *La Vision de Brahma,* reminds one of Calderón's most famous lines in *La Vida es sueño.*

> ¿Qué es la vida? Un frenesí.
> ¿Qué es la vida? Una ilusion,
> una sombra, una ficción,
> y el mayor bien es pequeño,
> que toda la vida es sueño
> y los sueños sueño son . . .

Soleils! Poussière d'Or . . .[2]

The preceding poems express a feeling, a mood of sadness, rather than an intellectual conviction. They represent more or less the negative and esthetic sides of our poet's ideal. *Suns! Golden grains* . . . , which is to be found almost at the end of his *Derniers Poèmes,* represents the positive side of his Nihilism, his belief in the ultimate extinction of life on this planet.

[2] Poem and translation, pp. 258, 259.

With characteristic sweep of imagination he pictures the myriads of stars in "the blue abyss." The "eternal silence" of that star-strewn space, instead of thrilling him with fear, as it did Pascal, gives him a happy sense of peace. But who knows but what those dazzling stars are filled with war, and pestilence and famine?

> Qui sait si, loin de nous, des voix désespérées
> Des plus amers sanglots ne troublent pas vos cieux?

But whether the stars are Hells or Heavens, at least we know through science that they, like the earth, after billions and billions of years, will probably cease to exist.

Let these things, which seem eternal, perish, as a dream vanishes with the morning. The moments of love and happiness which make man god-like outweigh all else.

The poem is closely allied to *Çunacépa,* and *The Supreme Kiss.* But here it is presented rather as an ideal than as an emotion or a passion.

Hypatie

In *Hypatie* we find a complete expression of the poet's chief ideal, the ideal of beauty. We also find an exposition of his attitude toward religion: hate for certain phases of it, and love for what is idealistic and beautiful in the cults of the divine. In contrast with Christianity we find the religious and philosophical thought of Greece, with its veneration for beauty—the quintessence of all that is human.

One can readily understand Leconte de Lisle's enthusiasm for Hypatia, the beautiful Greek girl who revived the teachings of Plato in Alexandria and was

killed by a mob incited through the Bishop Cyril's denunciation. He has treated the subject in a longer, but less successful poem, *Hypatie et Cyrille*. Hypatia's cult of the Greek gods and of Greek thought was doubtless similar to that of the poet and his friends, particularly Louis Ménard, who declared himself a polytheist. It was probably the beauty of the cult that appealed to Hypatia as it did to Leconte de Lisle. Greek teachings, with their blending of all the social interests and of all the interests of the individual, physical, emotional and intellectual, stand out in sharp contrast to the onesidedness of Christian teachings as exemplified by the hermits of Alexandria, who tortured their bodies, sacrificed the naturalness of their emotions, and stultified their minds.

> Le vil Galiléen t'a frappée et maudite,
> Mais tu tombes plus grande! Et maintenant, hélas!
> Le souffle de Platon et le corps d'Aphrodite
> Sont partis à jamais pour les beaux cieux d'Hellas!

It is not Christ but his misguided followers whom he means by the "vil Galiléen"; while "le souffle de Platon et le corps d'Aphrodite" of course refers to Hypatia. Though he had a special predilection for the Greek religion, and an antipathy to the Christian Church, Leconte de Lisle was ready to defend all divine cults.

> Toujours des Dieux vaincus embrassant la fortune,
> Un grand cœur les défend du sort injurieux:

He embraced the fortune of the vanquished gods, defending them from the fatal oblivion into which they fall, because in every religion there is something of the highest human aspirations, of the deepest human

emotions, crystallized, and objectified by the creative imagination. Apart from the moralizing tendencies of religion, which seek a plan of action, there is a close similarity between religion and art. Each has borrowed generously from the other. Where is the boundary line? To which sphere belongs the *Venus of Milo,* or Ruben's *Descent from the Cross,* or César Franck's *Beatitudes?* Think of the debt to religion owed by Homer, Dante, and Milton! Leconte de Lisle, realizing the wealth of beauty in all the principal religions, has borrowed from many.

There is an important difference between art and religion, however. The latter is chiefly interested in leading to a better, a more ideal state. Art *possesses* the perfection which religion *seeks.* As literature, the Bible will always appeal to men, no matter what their creed. The Iliad and the frieze that once adorned the Parthenon have outlived the Greek ritual. Immortality, eternity, spirituality, unity, and freedom, the native ideals of all peoples are contained in art. Religion, when "other-worldly," postpones the realization of its ideal to some hypothetical future. Art presents here and now an eternal world of the spirit, a world that is unified and humanized to meet the needs of the mind, a world in which the imagination is liberated, free to do all that is desirable, and impossible, in life.

Speaking of the other-worldly longings of the Christians, the poet says, addressing Hypatia:

> Que t'importait, ô vierge, un semblable délire?
> Ne possédais-tu pas cet idéal cherché?
> Va! dans ces cœurs troublés tes regards savaient lire,
> Et les Dieux bienveillants ne t' avaient rien caché.

Again, we find a suggestion of the "intellectual love towards God" of Spinoza, which consists in infinite understanding.

Le grave enseignement des vertus éternelles . . .

If we understand the ultimate reason for all things, all anger, all sorrow melts. The closer the mind comes to the unchanging essences of life, the closer we shall stand to eternity. Though the body will die, the mind will remain, unchanging, eternal. At that moment nothing can be added to or taken away from the spirit that once was man. The sum total of that spirit, the thoughts and deeds will go on affecting the world indestructibly. The closer the mind stood to the eternal truths, the more will be its power, its effectiveness, and the greater its immortality.

Imbued with life, the wise, the heroes rise!
With sacred song the poets chant each name;
And the ideal Olympus songward flies
To rest in purest Parthenons of fame.

Les sages, les héros se lèvent pleins de vie!
Les poètes en chœur murmurent leurs beaux noms;
Et l'Olympe idéal, qu'un chant sacré convie,
Sur l'ivoire s'assied dans les blancs Parthénons.

What does it matter, says the poet, if Hypatia be dead. She still survives in the depths of the human soul. Foul ugliness is to be seen on every hand; we have lost the road to Paros; the Gods have perished—but beauty still survives in the heart of the poet:

L'hymne mélodieux de la sainte Beauté!

In Beauty we are freed from the fluctuations of time; in Her what once seemed dead is born again. She

is the goal, to which all else is merely the pathway. She is supreme.

> Elle seule survit, immuable, éternelle.
> La mort peut disperser les univers tremblants,
> Mais la Beauté flamboie, et tout renaît en elle,
> Et les mondes encore roulent sous ses pieds blancs!

Le Cœur de Hialmar [3]

Le Cœur de Hialmar is deservedly one of the most popular poems of Leconte de Lisle. It enables one to live vicariously the life of the ancient Scandinavians, a life of drinking and singing, loving and fighting, which satisfies the primal impulses. It is an expression of the sentiment of self in a favorite form, that of courage. Also it presents a vision of immortality. What is most remarkable is that these values instead of detracting from or negating one another are mutually strengthening.

The horrors of war, etched with a few broad strokes, are rendered more vivid by the contrast of the Jarls sitting in their halls after the battle, drinking and singing, while their comrades lie on the field of death a prey to wolves. Nothing can daunt the hero, a true Viking, who braves all; and makes the supreme sacrifice of life and love. It is more important to him that he should show the highest courage, than that he should satisfy the longings of his heart.

It is in war-time, when annihilation is imminent, that we most seek to negate the idea of death. We do so especially when love is involved. During the recent War of the Nations, how many parental and other loving hearts turned to thoughts of existence in another world! Nevertheless, appreciation of the poem is not dependent on circumstance or personal experience. The clos-

[3] Poem and translation, pp. 230, 231.

ing lines voice the wish of all humanity throughout all times. Love of life constitutes our very essence. Death is the universal rule. No wonder that as we decline, coming nearer and nearer to the inevitable end, we fabricate the dream of immortality! What consolation Leconte de Lisle, bruised and battered by fate, must have found in recreating from Northern myth and legend this vision of life—free, unscarred and young forevermore!

Moi, je meurs. Mon esprit coule par vingt blessures.
J'ai fait mon temps. Buvez, ô loups, mon sang vermeil.
Jeune, brave, riant, libre et sans flétrissures,
Je vais m'asseoir parmi les Dieux, dans le soleil!

La Mort de Valmiki

La Mort de Valmiki is one of the noblest poems to be found in any language. It too expresses "l'âpre désir de l'immortalité." Usually Leconte de Lisle has given this desire the form of a compensatory ideal, or the expression of a profound melancholy at the impossibility of its realization. In this poem, however, it is presented as an expressive ideal, possible of fulfillment.

Vianey has pointed out the similarity of the opening stanzas to those of de Vigny's *Moïse,* in which the prophet ascends Nebo Mountain and looks down on the Land of Canaan. The situation is similar, and the character of Moses helps us to understand that of Valmiki, who is likewise a great spirit, weary of his tremendous task. More striking still is the similarity of the opening of the poem to other masterpieces of Leconte de Lisle himself, such as *Si l'Aurore,* and especially *L'Illusion suprême.* Valmiki represents Leconte

de Lisle's aspirations to free himself from the shifting flux of life, the bondage of passions that blow us hither and thither, and to find repose—

> Au sublime sommeil sans rêve et sans moment,
> Sur qui l'Oubli divin plane éternellement.

In death the poet will escape from the realms of the ephemeral to the realms of the eternal.

Were the poem to end here it would simply be another expression of the sentiment we found in *Le Secret de la vie;* but it goes further. Valmiki was a poet, the singer of the ancient heroes, the legendary author of the *Ramayana,* the great Hindu epic, which furnished material for the poem *Çunacépa.* Leconte de Lisle too was a singer of the ancient heroes; and with the recurrence of the images of the eagle thirsting for the changeless azure, and of the vision of the mountain as a symbol of glory, we are reminded of the youthful dreams of the creole poet, and picture him standing on the heights of the Île Bourbon gazing like Valmiki over a wide expanse of space.

> Les monts, piliers du ciel, et l'Océan sonore
> D'où s'élance et fleurit le Rosier de l'aurore.

Valmiki sees all India spread out before him. As he gazes, he has a vision of the world he has created, the *Ramayana* with its heroes:

> Le grand Daçarathide et le Mytiléene,
> Les sages, les guerriers, les vierges et les Dieux . . .

His spirit soars enraptured, and mingles with the souls of countless men. Valmiki has succeeded in fixing the beauty of this changing dream of life. What was

ephemeral has become eternal; and the soul of the poet will live forever in the heart of man. The vision of India mingling with the vision of the epic symbolizes according to Vianey the fact that "ancient India lives again in its entirety in the *Ramayana.*"

O large chant d'amour, de bonté, de vertu . . .

The ambition of the primitive poet is achieved. His spirit has triumphed over every obstacle. Nothing of the physical world of the senses matters now. The army of ants gradually devours what once was a living man.

This incident of the ants was taken from a passage in the Maha-Bharata, and is characteristic of Hindu mysticism. One is reminded of the famous poem by Baudelaire, *Une Charogne,* except that in the latter such stress is laid on the grewsome physical aspects of death that the majority of readers forget the entire point of the poem—

Que j'ai gardé la forme et l'essence divine . . .

Absorbed in contemplation of the immutable world of his own creation, Valmiki has found oblivion and immortality.

Et qui fut Valmiki, le poète immortel,
Dont l'âme harmonieuse emplit l'ombre où nous sommes
Et ne se taira plus sur les lèvres des hommes.

As the spirit of the Hindu poet lives in the *Ramayana,* so the spirit of Leconte de Lisle is embodied forever in *La Mort de Valmiki.*

Et ne se taira plus sur les lèvres des hommes.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Leconte de Lisle's Place in Literature

There is no such thing as a hierarchy of letters. If we reject the idea of *absolute* perfection, or *absolute* beauty, as I think we should, such classifications become artificial. Furthermore, what standards there are, are dependent in the last analysis on human nature: and what two human beings are exactly alike? Relatively, however, humanity is more or less the same; and allowing for the general differences, we may predict what will appeal to various types of people, or to all.

It has been pointed out that each art-period, and the art-history of each individual artist may be roughly divided into three parts: the first, one of spontaneity, in which the thing that is to be expressed is all-important; the second, one of maturity, in which the writer has something of moment to say and knows how to say it; and the third, a period of decay, in which nothing of importance is said, but the manner of saying it becomes of chief interest. Take, for example, French Classic Drama; Corneille would represent the first, Racine the second, and the host of minor dramatists to whom obedience to the *rules* and traditions was the chief consideration would represent the third. As regards lyric poetry of the nineteenth century, the Romanticists, the Parnassians, and the Symbolists, would

respectively embody the three periods. According to this classification a number of the romantic poets would overlap into the second period, notably: de Vigny, Musset, and above all Hugo. Some of the middle group, such as Baudelaire, would fall into the third group as much as the second, although in point of time they are closer to the first.

Such a division is founded of course on the analogy of the living organism, and at best is only an analogy, and does not always apply in the case of social phenomena. It is no more a reproduction of the facts than a map is a reproduction of the country it represents. As an analogy, however, it is useful, and helps us to find our way through a complex mass of phenomena, as a map helps us to find our way in a given country.

With the Decadents and Symbolists there have been more excellent theories as to how poetry should be written than poems of great worth. However, Verlaine, Albert Samain, Henri de Régnier, Jean Moréas, Verhaeren and a few others when at their best belong to the second group as well as to the third. *Les Flamands* by Verhaeren is typical of both the best and worst of the Parnassian movement. In *Les Stances,* where Moréas is at his best, he rejects all theories, and is simply a poet. There is much that is exquisite and beautiful in the poetry of the Decadents, Symbolists and writers of free-verse.

Granting the truth of the theory that clarity is more essential in the expression of ideas than of emotions, let us not forget that it is through the intellect that the emotions are expressed. A dog is capable of feeling love, but sing him a love song, and see if he appreciates it. The willful obscurity of Mallarmé, which is not without a certain charm, is not new in literature. We

hear little of such attempts, because they have been abortive. One of the best criticisms of such efforts was made by a French poet of the 16th century, who told one of his "symbolist" contemporaries that if his chief aim was to be incomprehensible, there was no reason why he should not try silence.

One of the chief criticisms against Leconte de Lisle is that he is too clear. This fault was in fact the chief reason for the Symbolist reaction against him. As we have seen, however, in considering the individual poems, his clarity is more often a virtue than a vice. What de Sanctis says of Leopardi in the following passage is equally true of the French poet.

"To fuse the evanescent and the exact, the ideal and the natural, clarity of imagination with vagueness of fancy, so that everything is clear though the impression is fleeting, such is the miracle of this poetry. In his naturalism, in his plastic clarity, in the simple way in which he relates even the most terrible things, one feels his long familiarity with the Greeks, which even in a conception essentially romantic keeps him clear of the slightest trace of the romantic manner."

As for the *power of suggestion* of a well chosen word, properly placed, it is to be found as frequently in Leconte de Lisle as in the later French poets, who made *suggestion* and musicalness their slogan. Apart from Verlaine, the music of whose verse is produced by the same means as that of Leconte de Lisle, there is less music rather than more in their verse.

The chief source of error of the Symbolists and others who have criticized Leconte de Lisle's poetry is that of most German and English critics, who confuse imagination with fancy. If his verse is lacking in the latter, it is replete with the former. And while fancy ever roaming

idly flits over the surface of things, imagination lies at the very heart of life.

Leconte de Lisle has a definite place in the literature of the world. He is closer to the Greeks than any poet since Antiquity. He has the intimate plastic beauty of Theocritus, and something of the majesty of Pindar. As the great South American critic, Rodó, has written in the Prologue of Rubén Darío's *Prosas Profanas:*

"In vain Leconte de Lisle laments that we have lost forever the road to Paros. Does not the renascence of Greece in his translations and poems evoke in you, as in me, the illusion of titanic shoulders, rending the waves of the Ægean, sinking to the deepest depths, only to rise again serenely lifting to the skies the mighty weight of all that sacred land?"

Next to the Greeks, Leconte de Lisle is closest to the Italians. The image of Dante comes to one again and again on reading his verse. He is a younger brother of Leopardi and an elder brother of Carducci, whose work he influenced.

In England, he makes one think of Swinburne, but even more of Milton. He has the latter's solitary, uncomprising spirit, the same high artistic ideal, the same preoccupation with things of the spirit, the same democratic love of humanity and freedom—a bit aloof perhaps, but none the less determined. There is something of the born rebel in both. They both had the same classical background and the power of imagination which enables them to evoke on a large scale, with convincing reality, the purely imaginative. Both were sensitive to the music of verse, without sacrificing the demands of the intellect for solidity of form and content.

Like Milton also Leconte de Lisle never has been and never will be a "popular" poet. He is not a universal writer in the sense that Molière or Hugo are universal. There is something in these writers, as there is in Homer, Shakspere, or Dante, which appeals to the child, or to the uneducated person, as well as to the cultivated.

His field is so different from that of Molière that it would be unjust to both to place them side by side. Compared with Hugo, Leconte de Lisle not only lacks universality of appeal, but also develops fewer themes. On the other hand he is a greater artist. Many of even the finest poems of Hugo are marred by minor blemishes of taste.

If Hugo's mighty lyre has more chords than Leconte de Lisle's, at least it has no wider range. Like all great artists: like Michael Angelo in sculpture, and Beethoven in music, he, the chief of the Parnassians, combines grace and delicacy with strength and depth. What could be more delicate and evanescent than *Épiphanie,* or more grandiose than *Quaïn?*

Leconte de Lisle will have a relatively small following, but that following will be assured him, from age to age, for all time.

As Brunetière has pointed out, no modern poet, lyric or dramatic, in France or any other country has created his work, to use Spinoza's expression, to a higher degree "under the aspect of eternity." Fifty years have elapsed since some of his poems were written, and much has happened since then; yet as the French critic so justly notes: "His beautiful poems show no signs of age, they are no older now than when they were produced; and *les Méditations, les Nuits, les Con-*

templations seem old-fashioned in places. . . .'' There is a close parallel between our poet and Alfred de Vigny, and yet to-day the latter's masterpiece, *La Maison du Berger,* is almost never printed without omitting parts which would cause a smile. Even Musset's *Nuits* seem rhetorical here and there, ''but *Khirôn and Niobé, le Rêve du jaguar* and *le Sommeil du condor, la Fontaine aux lianes* or *le Manchy* still are all that they were when they first appeared, with an added beauty which time imparts to the things it does not destroy.''

In a youthful poem Leconte de Lisle addresses the statue of Venus of Milo, invoking it to kindle the sublime spark in his breast, so that his fame may last beyond the tomb, and his thoughts may flow in golden rhythm, like a divine metal in a harmonious mold.

> Allume dans mon sein la sublime étincelle,
> N'enferme point ma gloire au tombeau soucieux;
> Et fais que ma pensée en rythmes d'or ruisselle,
> Comme un divin métal au moule harmonieux.

His prayer has been answered. The same serene beauty which has shone in the ''sacred marble'' for centuries, will shine for centuries to come in the poet's verse.

PART III

SELECTED POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS

ÉPIPHANIE

Elle passe, tranquille, en un rêve divin,
Sur le bord du plus frais de tes lacs, ô Norvège!
Le sang rose et subtil qui dore son col fin
Est doux comme un rayon de l'aube sur la neige.

Au murmure indécis du frêne et du bouleau,
Dans l'étincellement et le charme de l'heure,
Elle va, réflétée au pâle azur de l'eau
Qu'un vol silencieux de papillons effleure.

Quand un souffle furtif glisse en ses cheveux blonds,
Une cendre ineffable inonde son épaule;
Et, de leur transparence argentant leurs cils longs,
Ses yeux ont la couleur des belles nuits du Pôle.

Purs d'ombre et de désir, n'ayant rien espéré
Du monde périssable où rien d'ailé ne reste,
Jamais ils n'ont souri, jamais ils n'ont pleuré,
Ces yeux calmes ouverts sur l'horizon céleste.

Et le Gardien pensif du mystique oranger
Des balcons de l'Aurore éternelle se penche,
Et regarde passer ce fantôme léger
Dans les plis de sa robe immortellement blanche.

EPIPHANY

She passes, slowly, rapt in heav'nly dreams,
O Norway, by the freshest of thy lakes!
Her slender throat a subtle softness takes,
As snow at dawn is tinged with rosy beams.

The birch tree whispers and the aspen sighs,
While, radiant as that charming hour, she goes;
Reflected in the wave her image flows,
Where hover silently shy butterflies.

A sly breeze shakes the golden hair that lies,
As light as ash, and trembles in the air.
With long, transparent lash, her eyes are fair,
The color of the quiet Polar skies.

And pure of all desire, from false hope kept
Of this vain world where all things wingèd die;
Those calm eyes, opened to the azure sky,
Have never smiled, nor ever have they wept.

The pensive Guardian of the mystic light,
From Dawn's eternal balconies bends low,
To watch the gentle phantom lightly go
In snowy folds of robes forever white.

THESTYLIS

Aux pentes du coteau, sous les roches moussues,
L'eau vive en murmurant filtre par mille issues,
Croît, déborde, et remue en son cours diligent
La mélisse odorante et les cailloux d'argent.
Le soir monte : on entend s'épandre dans les plaines
De flottantes rumeurs et de vagues haleines,
Le doux mugissement des grands bœufs fatigués
Qui s'arrêtent pour boire en traversant les gués,
Et sous les rougeurs d'or du soleil qui décline
Le bruit grêle des pins au front de la colline.
Dans les sentiers pierreux qui mènent à la mer,
Rassasié de thym et de cytise amer,
L'indocile troupeau de chèvres aux poils lisses
De son lait parfumé va remplir les éclisses ;
Le tintement aigu des agrestes grelots
S'unit par intervalle à la plainte des flots,
Tandis que, prolongeant d'harmonieuses luttes,
Les jeunes chevriers soufflent aux doubles flûtes.

Rapide et blanche, avec son amphore d'argile,
Vers cette source claire accourt d'un pied agile,
Et s'assied sur le roc tapissé de gazon,
D'où le regard s'envole à l'immense horizon.

. . . . . .

THESTYLIS

Atwixt the mossy stones, adown the hills,
The waters filter in a thousand rills;
They stir the pebbles, swell in pools, o'erflow,
And wave the fragrant mint leaves as they go.
At eventide from somber plains arise
Low, floating murmurs, softly-muffled cries,
And gentle lowings, as the weary flocks
In fording pause to drink among the rocks;
And 'neath the failing sunset's ruddy gold,
The whisper of the pines that crown the wold.
O'er stony paths that meet the sounding sea,
The sleek goats wander homeward fitfully,
From browsing thyme and cistus in the vales,
To fill with fragrant milk the oaken pails;
The distant booming of the breaking swells
Is mingled with the tinkling of the bells;
The while with double flutes the herdsmen vie,
And pipe sweet songs beneath the open sky.

[We see the water nymphs dancing at twilight, and Thestylis, "a maiden of Etna," in a pose which recalls the Greek statue in the Louvre of a young girl fastening her tunic.]

Thus swift and white, she bears the graceful urn,
As towards the silvery spring her footsteps turn,
And from the rock bedecked with mosses deep,
She views the vast horizon's distant sweep.

[She is tall and dark and very beautiful; and like Artemis she is virginal and shy.]

Mais quand la Nuit divine allume l'astre aux cieux,
Il lui plaît de hanter le mont silencieux,
Et de mêler au bruit de l'onde qui murmure
D'un cœur blessé la plainte harmonieuse et pure :

. . . . . .

—Ou, si tu dois un jour m'oublier sur la terre,
Que ma cendre repose en ce lieu solitaire,
Et qu'une main amie y grave pour adieu :
—Ici dort Thestylis, celle qu'aimait un Dieu !—

Elle se tait, écoute, et dans l'ombre nocturne,
Accoudant son beau bras sur la rondeur de l'urne,
Le sein ému, le front à demi soulevé,
Inquiète, elle attend celui qu'elle a rêvé.
Et le vent monotone endort les noirs feuillages ;
La mer en gémissant berce les coquillages ;
La montagne muette, au loin, de toutes parts,
Des coteaux aux vallons, brille de feux épars ;
Et la source elle-même, au travers de la mousse,
S'agite et fuit avec une chanson plus douce.

Mais le jeune Immortel, le céleste Inconnu,
L'Amant mystérieux et cher n'est pas venu !
Il faut partir, hélas ! et regagner la plaine.
Thestylis sur son front pose l'amphore pleine,
S'éloigne, hésite encore, et sent couler ses pleurs ;
De la joue et du col s'effacent les couleurs ;
Son corps charmant, Éros, frissonne de tes fièvres !
Mais bientôt, l'œil brillant, un fier sourire aux lèvres,
Elle songe tout bas, reprenant son chemin :
—Je l'aime et je suis belle ! Il m'entendra demain !—

. . .

But when the night divine illumes the sky,
She loves to haunt the silence there on high,
And mingle with the sobbing of the springs
A sad heart's pure, harmonious murmurings:

[Thestylis adores a young god, Apollo perhaps, appearing in the morning twilight of her dreams, and manifest in the wonders of Nature. She calls aloud and begs him to come to her, and through immortal love to preserve her beauty that he may enjoy it forever.]

"Or should I be on earth some day forgot,
I'd choose for endless sleep this lonely spot,
And friendly hands might carve above the sod,
—'Here lies a maid beloved of a god!' "

She halts and listens in the darkness dim,
And rests her fair arm on the pitcher's brim;
Her bosom heaves, half-raised her dark eye gleams;
Intent, she waits for Him of whom she dreams.
The branches sigh in sleepy monotones,
Along the sandy shore the ocean moans;
Afar the silent mountain is alight,
From hill to vale the scattered lamps are bright;
And underneath the moss, the bubbling spring
In fleeing seaward seems more sweet to sing.

And yet the young Immortal, fair Unknown,
Her mystic Lover, did not come! Alone,
Alas! she rises, soon she must return;
So, poising on her brow the slender urn,
She starts; then halting, feels the tear-drops flow,
Her cheek, her throat grows pale as Etna's snow.
Thy fever stings her to her finger tips,
O Love! But soon, with smile of pride upon her lips,
She muses softly as she turns away;
"I love him, I am fair. He'll come some day!"

LES ELFES

Couronnés de thym et de marjolaine,
Les Elfes joyeux dansent sur la plaine.

Du sentier des bois aux daims familier,
Sur un noir cheval, sort un chevalier.
Son éperon d'or brille en la nuit brune;
Et, quand il traverse un rayon de lune,
On voit resplendir, d'un reflet changeant,
Sur sa chevelure un casque d'argent.

Couronnés de thym et de marjolaine,
Les Elfes joyeux dansent sur la plaine.

Ils l'entourent tous d'un essaim léger
Qui dans l'air muet semble voltiger.
—Hardi chevalier, par la nuit sereine,
Où vas-tu si tard? dit la jeune Reine.
De mauvais esprits hantent les forêts;
Viens danser plutôt sur les gazons frais.—

Couronnés de thym et de marjolaine,
Les Elfes joyeux dansent sur la plaine.

—Non! ma fiancée aux yeux clairs et doux
M'attend, et demain nous serons époux.
Laissez-moi passer, Elfes des prairies,
Qui foulez en rond les mousses fleuries;
Ne m'attardez pas loin de mon amour,
Car voici déjà les lueurs du jour.—

Couronné de thym et de marjolaine,
Les Elfes joyeux dansent sur la plaine.

THE ELVES

With thyme and marjoram all sweetly crowned,
The merry Elves are dancing in a round.

Along a woodland path, the haunt of does,
A cavalier upon a black horse goes.
His golden spurs are shining in the night;
And crossing in the moon's unearthly light,
One sees above his hair the flashing rays
Of light that on his silver helmet plays.

With thyme and marjoram all sweetly crowned,
The merry Elves are dancing in a round.

In lithesome throng they all surround him there,
Seeming to hover in the silent air.
"Bold cavalier, abroad this night serene,
Whither so late?" inquires the youthful Queen,
"For evil spirits in the wood are seen;
Come dance with us instead upon the green."

With thyme and marjoram all sweetly crowned,
The merry Elves are dancing in a round.

"No, No! With clear sweet eyes my fiancée
Awaits me, 'tis our joyous wedding day.
So let me pass, good Fairies of the plain,
Who tread the flowery moss in graceful train.
Don't hold me from the one I love so dear;
Already glints the dawning day so near."

With thyme and majoram all sweetly crowned,
The merry Elves are dancing in a round.

—Reste, chevalier. Je te donnerai
L'opale magique et l'anneau doré,
Et ce qui vaut mieux que gloire et fortune,
Ma robe filée au clair de la lune.
—Non ! dit-il.—Va donc !—Et de son doigt blanc
Elle touche au cœur le guerrier tremblant.

Couronnés de thym et de marjolaine,
Les Elfes joyeux dansent sur la plaine.

Et sous l'éperon le noir cheval part.
Il court, il bondit et va sans retard ;
Mais le chevalier frissonne et se penche ;
Il voit sur la route une forme blanche
Qui marche sans bruit et lui tend les bras :
—Elfe, esprit, démon, ne m'arrête pas !—

Couronné de thym et de marjolaine,
Les Elfes joyeux dansent sur la plaine.

—Ne m'arrête pas, fantôme odieux !
Je vais épouser ma belle aux doux yeux.
—O mon cher époux, la tombe éternelle
Sera notre lit de noce, dit-elle.
Je suis morte !—Et lui, la voyant ainsi,
D'angoisse et d'amour tombe mort aussi.

Couronnés de thym et de marjolaine,
Les Elfes joyeux dansent sur la plaine.

"Come, stay! my cavalier. For you I'll bring
My magic opal and my golden ring,
And, precious more than fame and sweetest praise,
My moonlight robe, 'tis woven of its rays."
—"No, no!" he said.—"Then go!"—With finger white
She touched the warrior's heart! He starts in fright.

With thyme and marjoram all sweetly crowned,
The merry Elves are dancing in a round.

The black horse feels the spur, with no delay
He leaps and dashes down the woodland way.
Again the horseman quivers, pale with fright . . .
He sees a phantom wrapped in ghostly white
That comes and lifts its arms in silent plea.
"Elf, spirit, demon, do not tarry me!"

With thyme and marjoram all sweetly crowned,
The merry Elves are dancing in a round.

"Stay me not, direful phantom, for I ride
To take my soft-eyed beauty for my bride."
"O darling bridegroom, the eternal tomb
Will be our bridal bed, till day of doom."
"Dying!" she gasps;—he hears the sound so dread,
And falls, from grief and love, beside her, dead.

With thyme and marjoram all sweetly crowned,
The merry Elves are dancing in a round.

DANS LE CIEL CLAIR

Dans le ciel clair rayé par l'hirondelle alerte,
Le matin qui fleurit comme un divin rosier
Parfume la feuillée étincelante et verte
Où les nids amoureux, palpitants, l'aile ouverte,
A la cime des bois chantent à plein gosier
Le matin qui fleurit comme un divin rosier
Dans le ciel clair rayé par l'hirondelle alerte.

En grêles notes d'or, sur les graviers polis,
Les eaux vives, filtrant et pleuvant goutte à goutte,
Caressent du baiser de leur léger roulis
La bruyère et le thym, les glaïeuls et les lys;
Et le jeune chevreuil, que l'aube éveille, écoute
Les eaux vives filtrant et pleuvant goutte à goutte
En grêles notes d'or sur les graviers polis.

Le long des frais buissons où rit le vent sonore,
Par le sentier qui fuit vers le lointain charmant
Où la molle vapeur bleuit et s'évapore,
Tous deux, sous la lumière humide de l'aurore,
S'en vont entrelacés et passent lentement
Par le sentier qui fuit vers le lointain charmant,
Le long des frais buissons où rit le vent sonore.

La volupté d'aimer clôt à demi leurs yeux,
Ils ne savent plus rien du vol de l'heure brève,
Le charme et la beauté de la terre et des cieux
Leur rendent éternel l'instant délicieux,
Et, dans l'enchantement de ce rêve d'un rêve,
Ills ne savent plus rien du vol de l'heure brève,
La volupté d'aimer clôt à demi leurs yeux.

ACROSS THE CLEAR SKY

Across the clear sky streaked by swallows' flight,
The morning budding like a heav'nly rose
Makes the green foliage fragrant, glist'ning bright.
From loving nests aquiver in the light,
Above the tree tops melody o'erflows
The morning budding like a heav'nly rose
Across the clear sky streaked by swallows' flight.

O'er polished pebbles with a tiny chime,
The tinkling waters trickle, silv'ry clear,
Caressing with a kiss of rippling rhyme
The heather, iris, lilies, and the thyme;
The faun, the sun awakened, stops to hear
The tinkling waters trickle, silv'ry clear,
O'er polished pebbles with a tiny chime.

Through thickets where the fresh wind gaily blows,
By paths that lure them with a hidden charm,
To where far-off the blue mist softly rose,
Enwrapped in vap'rous light of dawn there goes
A pair of lovers slowly, arm in arm,
By paths that lure them with a hidden charm,
Through thickets where the fresh wind gaily blows.

Aswoon with love, with dreamy half-closed eyes,
O'ercome with joy they, too, eternal seem,
Like all that beauty of the earth and skies;
They quite forget how swift the brief hour flies,
Enchanted by that dream within a dream;
O'ercome with joy they, too, eternal seem,
Aswoon with love, with dreamy half-closed eyes.

Dans le ciel clair rayé par l'hirondelle alerte
L'aube fleurit toujours comme un divin rosier ;
Mais eux, sous la feuillée étincelante et verte,
N'entendront plus, un jour, les doux nids, l'aile ouverte
Jusqu'au fond de leur cœur chanter à plein gosier
Le matin qui fleurit comme un divin rosier
Dans le ciel clair rayé par l'hirondelle alerte.

Across the clear sky streaked by swallows' flight
The dawn still opens like a heav'nly rose;
But they, among the green leaves glist'ning bright,
Will hear no more the nests that greet the light
With song that stirs their hearts and overflows
The morning, budding like a heav'nly rose
Across the clear sky streaked by swallows' flight.

LES DAMNÉS

La terre était immense, et la nue était morne;
Et j'étais comme un mort en ma tombe enfermé
Et j'entendais gémir dans l'espace sans borne
Ceux dont le cœur saigna pour avoir trop aimé:

Femmes, adolescents, hommes, vierges pâlies,
Nés aux siècles anciens, enfants des jours nouveaux,
Qui, rongés de désirs et de mélancolies,
Se dressaient devant moi du fond de leurs tombeaux.

Plus nombreux que les flots amoncelés des grèves,
Dans un noir tourbillon de haine et de douleurs,
Tous ces suppliciés des impossibles rêves
Roulaient, comme la mer, les yeux brûlés de pleurs.

Et sombre, le front nu, les ailes flamboyantes,
Les flagellant encor de désirs furieux,
Derrière le troupeau des âmes défaillantes
Volait le vieil Amour, le premier né des dieux.

De leur plainte irritant la lugubre harmonie,
Lui-même consumé du mal qu'il fait subir,
Il chassait, à travers l'étendue infinie,
Ceux qui sachant aimer n'en ont point su mourir.

Et moi, je me levais de ma tombe glacée;
Un souffle au milieu d'eux m'emportait sans retour;
Et j'allais, me mêlant à la course insensée,
Aux lamentations des damnés de l'amour.

O morts livrés aux fouets des tardives déesses,
O Titans enchainés dans l'Erèbe éternel,
Heureux! vous ignoriez ces affreuses détresses,
Et vous n'avez perdu que la terre et le ciel!

THE DAMNED

The land was vast, 'neath dark clouds hanging low;
As though within a tomb I seemed, and dead.
I heard resound through space the cries of woe
Of those whose hearts with too great loving bled.

Women, and virgins, men, and youths forlorn,
Consumed with longing and with dreary gloom,
In ancient centuries, and years new born,
Appeared before me rising from the tomb.

More numerous than waves, in endless streams
Of dismal whirling clouds of hates and fears,
This sea of tortured victims, drunk with dreams,
Was eddying, with eyes that burned with tears.

With somber, naked brow, and wings of fire,
Lashing the band of fainting souls with rods
Of ravening, quenchless, furious desire,
Flew ancient Love, the first-born of the gods.

Inciting harmonies of mournful woe,
He drove them through the never-ending sky,
Himself devoured by all they undergo,
—The souls who loved yet knew not how to die.

And rising likewise from my frigid tomb,
I felt myself swept upward far above,
And madly whirled in endless, fatal doom,
'Mid cries of those forever damned by love.

O Titans, bound in hell's eternal chains,
O dead, by other Furies whipped and tossed,
You happy ones, you ne'er have known our pains,
And only earth and heaven have you lost.

LE BAISER SUPREME

Heureux qui, possédant la Chimère éternelle,
Livre au Monstre divin un cœur ensanglanté,
Et savoure, pour mieux s'anéantir en elle,
L'extase de la mort et de la volupté
Dans l'éclair d'un baiser qui vaut l'éternité!

THE SUPREME KISS

Happy is he who, writhing in the clasp
Of the Chimera, dies in ecstasy,
Tasting her lotus breath in one last gasp,
—A lightning kiss worth all eternity!

PANTOUNS MALAIS

I

L'éclair vibre sa flèche torse
A l'horizon mouvant des flots.
Sur ta natte de fine écorce
Tu rêves, les yeux demi-clos.

A l'horizon mouvant des flots
La foudre luit sur les écumes.
Tu rêves, les yeux demi-clos,
Dans la case que tu parfumes.

La foudre luit sur les écumes,
L'ombre est en proie au vent hurleur.
Dans la case que tu parfumes
Tu rêves et souris, ma fleur!

L'ombre est en proie au vent hurleur,
Il s'engouffre au fond des ravines.
Tu rêves et souris, ma fleur!
Le cœur plein de chansons divines.

Il s'engouffre au fond des ravines,
Parmi le fracas des torrents.
Le cœur plein de chansons divines,
Monte, nage aux cieux transparents!

Parmi le fracas des torrents
L'arbre éperdu s'agite et plonge.
Monte, nage aux cieux transparents,
Sur l'aile d'un amoureux songe!

MALAYAN PANTOUNS

I

A quivering flash of lightning gleams,
Where moving flood meets somber skies.
Thou liest cradled by thy dreams,
With head thrown back, and half-closed eyes.

Where moving flood meets somber skies,
Like silver is the storm-tossed foam.
With head thrown back, and half-closed eyes,
Thou perfumest thy wind-rocked home.

Like silver is the storm-tossed foam;
Throughout the darkness shrieks the wind.
Thou perfumest thy wind-rocked home,
Thou hast a smile—thy dream is kind!

Throughout the darkness shrieks the wind;
Down deep defiles it sweeps along.
Thou hast a smile—thy dream is kind!
Thy heart is filled with magic song.

Down deep defiles it sweeps along,
Amid the torrent's thunderous roar.
Thy soul is filled with magic song.
Toward roseate heavens rise and soar!

Amid the torrent's thunderous roar,
The trees are torn from heights above.
Toward roseate heavens rise and soar
Upon the languorous wings of love!

L'arbre éperdu s'agite et plonge,
Le roc bondit déraciné.
Sur l'aile d'un amoureux songe
Berce ton cœur illuminé !

Le roc bondit déraciné
Vers la mer ivre de sa force.
Berce ton cœur illuminé !
L'éclair vibre sa flèche torse.

II

Voici des perles de Mascate
Pour ton beau col, ô mon amour !
Un sang frais ruisselle, écarlate,
Sur le pont du blême Giaour.

Pour ton beau col, ô mon amour,
Pour ta peau ferme, lisse et brune !
Sur le pont du blême Giaour
Des yeux morts regardent la lune.

Pour ta peau ferme, lisse et brune,
J'ai conquis ce trésor charmant.
Des yeux morts regardent la lune
Farouche au fond du firmament.

J'ai conquis ce trésor charmant,
Mais est-il rien que tu n'effaces ?
Farouche au fond du firmament,
La lune reluit sur leurs faces.

The trees are torn from heights above.
Uprooted boulders leap and start.
Upon the languorous wings of love,
Thou lullest thy enraptured heart.

Uprooted boulders leap and start,
Drunk with their force—the tempest screams.
Thou lullest thy enraptured heart.
A quivering flash of lightning gleams.

II

Take these pearls from far Muskaht,
For thy lovely neck, my flower!
Pools of scarlet blood lie hot,
Where in splendor dwelt the Giaour.

For thy lovely neck, my flower,
For thy soft skin, smooth and bare!
Where in splendor dwelt the Giaour,
Eyes of dead men grimly stare.

For thy soft skin, smooth and bare,
I have won this dazzling prize.
Eyes of dead men grimly stare
Far adown the sullen skies.

I have won this dazzling prize.
Every woe, thy glance redeems.
Far adown the sullen skies,
On their faces moonlight gleams.

Mais est-il rien que tu n'effaces?
Tes longs yeux sont un double éclair.
La lune reluit sur leurs faces,
L'odeur du sang parfume l'air.

Tes longs yeux sont un double éclair;
Je t'aime, étoile de ma vie!
L'odeur du sang parfume l'air,
Notre fureur est assouvie.

Je t'aime, étoile de ma vie,
Rayon de l'aube, astre du soir!
Notre fureur est assouvie,
Le Giaour s'enfonce au flot noir.

Rayon de l'aube, astre du soir,
Dans mon cœur ta lumière éclate!
Le Giaour s'enfonce au flot noir!
Voici des perles de Mascate.

III

Sous l'arbre où pend la rouge mangue
Dors, les mains derrière le cou.
Le grand python darde sa langue
Du haut des tiges de bambou.

Dors, les mains derrière le cou,
La mousseline autour des hanches.
Du haut des tiges de bambou
Le soleil filtre en larmes blanches.

Every woe, thy glance redeems;
Eyes like thine are wells of light.
On their faces moonlight gleams,
Is it blood that scents the night?

Eyes like thine are wells of light.
Thee I love, my star, my pride!
Is it blood that scents the night?
Now our rage is satisfied.

Thee I love, my star, my pride,
Light of dawn, my lotus bud!
Now our rage is satisfied,
The Giaour sinks slowly in the flood.

Light of dawn, my lotus bud,
Thou my joy—O happy lot!
The Giaour sinks slowly in the flood!
Take these pearls from far Muskaht.

III

Beneath the tree where scarlet mangos glow,
Repose, thy tiny hands behind thy head.
The python darts its tongue, uncurling slow
From where bamboos their trembling branches spread.

Repose, thy tiny hands behind thy head.
Soft muslin girdles thee in milky white.
From where bamboos their trembling branches spread,
The sunbeams filter through in tears of light.

La mousseline autour des hanches,
Tu dores l'ombre, et l'embellis.
Le soleil filtre en larmes blanches
Parmi les nids de bengalis.

Tu dores l'ombre, et l'embellis,
Dans l'herbe couleur d'émeraude.
Parmi les nids de bengalis
Un vol de guêpes vibre et rôde.

Dans l'herbe couleur d'émeraude
Qui te voit ne peut t'oublier!
Un vol de guêpes vibre et rôde
Du santal au géroflier.

Qui te voit ne peut t'oublier;
Il t'aimera jusqu'à la tombe.
Du santal au géroflier
L'épervier poursuit la colombe.

Il t'aimera jusqu'à la tombe.
Du santal au géroflier
L'épervier poursuit la colombe;
Elle rend l'âme au fond des bois.

O femme, n'aime qu'une fois!
Le Praho sombre approche et tangue.
Elle rend l'âme au fond des bois
Sous l'arbre où pend la rouge mangue.

Soft muslin girdles thee in milky white.
Thy presence is like gold, within the shade.
The sunbeams filter through in tears of light.
The bengalee its sheltered nest has made.

Thy presence is like gold, within the shade,
Upon the grass which sheds an emerald light.
The bengalee its sheltered nest has made,
The wasp drifts by with ominous, vibrant flight.

Upon the grass, which sheds an emerald light,
Who could forget, who once had gazed on thee?
The wasp drifts by with ominous, vibrant flight,
Between the sandalwood and tamarind tree.

Who could forget, who once had gazed on thee?
Until the tomb thou shalt possess his love.
Between the sandalwood and tamarind tree,
The falcon presses hard the frightened dove.

Until the tomb thou shalt possess his love!
O woman, hear me, love but once—and die!
The falcon presses hard the frightened dove.
From the dark wood there comes a piteous cry.

O woman, hear me, love but once—and die!
The pitching proa comes, 'tis time to go.
From the dark wood there comes a piteous cry,
Beneath the tree where scarlet mangos glow.

IV

Le hinné fleuri teint tes ongles roses,
Tes chevilles d'ambre ont des grelots d'or.
J'entends miauler, dans les nuits moroses,
Le Seigneur rayé, le Roi de Timor.

Tes chevilles d'ambre ont des grelots d'or,
Ta bouche a le goût du miel vert des ruches.
Le Seigneur rayé, le Roi de Timor,
Le voilà qui rôde et tend ses embûches.

Ta bouche a le goût du miel vert des ruches,
Ton rire joyeux est un chant d'oiseau.
Le voilà qui rôde et tend ses embûches:
C'est l'heure où le daim va boire au cours d'eau.

Ton rire joyeux est un chant d'oiseau,
Tu cours et bondis mieux que les gazelles.
C'est l'heure où le daim va boire au cours d'eau;
Il a vu jaillir deux jaunes prunelles.

Tu cours et bondis mieux que les gazelles,
Mais ton cœur est traître et ta bouche ment!
Il a vu jaillir deux jaunes prunelles;
Un frisson de mort l'étreint brusquement.

Mais ton cœur est traître et ta bouche ment!
Ma lame de cuivre à mon poing flamboie.
Un frisson de mort l'étreint brusquement:
Le royal Chasseur a saisi sa proie.

IV

The flowering henna stains thy rosy nails,
Thy golden ankle-bells most sweetly ring.
I hear from out the jungle night sharp wails.
The lord of all Timor, the striped King.

Thy golden ankle-bells most sweetly ring,
Thy mouth tastes sweet as honey from the hive.
The lord of all Timor, the striped King,
He comes. Ah, woe to everything alive!

Thy mouth tastes sweet as honey from the hive,
A bird's song is no lovelier than thy laugh.
He comes. Ah, woe to everything alive!
At the stream's edge the deer has stopped to quaff.

A bird's song is no lovelier than thy laugh,
Gazelles can run no faster, leap no higher.
At the stream's edge the deer has stopped to quaff,
He sees two gleaming eyes of yellow fire.

Gazelles can run no faster, leap no higher;
But treacherous is thy heart and false thy breath!
He sees two gleaming eyes of yellow fire.
He shivers with the pangs of sudden death.

But treacherous is thy heart and false thy breath!
My blade shines like the sun at full mid-day.
He shivers with the pangs of sudden death.
The royal Hunter seizes fast his prey.

Ma lame de cuivre à mon poing flamboie;
Nul n'aura l'amour qui m'était si cher.
Le royal Chasseur a saisi sa proie;
Dix griffes d'acier lui mordent la chair.

Nul n'aura l'amour qui m'était si cher,
Meurs! Un long baiser sur tes lèvres closes!
Dix griffes d'acier lui mordent la chair.
Le hinné fleuri teint tes ongles roses!

V

O mornes yeux! Lèvre pâlie!
J'ai dans l'âme un chagrin amer.
Le vent bombe la voile emplie,
L'écume argente au loin la mer.

J'ai dans l'âme un chagrin amer:
Voici sa belle tête morte!
L'écume argente au loin la mer,
Le Praho rapide m'emporte.

Voici sa belle tête morte!
Je l'ai coupée avec mon kriss.
Le Praho rapide m'emporte
En bondissant comme l'axis.

Je l'ai coupée avec mon kriss;
Elle saigne au mât qui la berce.
En bondissant comme l'axis
Le Praho plonge ou se renverse.

My blade shines like the sun at full mid-day.
No one shall claim the love I dearly bought.
The royal Hunter seizes fast his prey.
Ten claws of steel within its flesh are caught.

No one shall claim the love I dearly bought.
Die! . . . A long kiss before thy red mouth pales!
Ten claws of steel within its flesh are caught,
The flowering henna stains thy rosy nails!

V

O sightless eyes! O lips so pale!
My soul is choked with bitter woe.
The fierce wind swells the tugging sail,
Afar the sea-foam gleams like snow.

My soul is choked with bitter woe!
Her beauteous head all lifeless lies.
Afar the sea-foam gleams like snow;
Away the rapid proa flies.

Her beauteous head all lifeless lies,
'Twas severed by my own sharp kreese.
Away the rapid proa flies;
I seek oblivion and peace.

'Twas severed by my own sharp kreese,
It bleeds and swings upon the mast.
I seek oblivion and peace;
The storm-tossed proa plunges fast.

Elle saigne au mât qui la berce;
Son dernier râle me poursuit.
Le Praho plonge ou se renverse,
La mer blême asperge la nuit.

Son dernier râle me poursuit.
Est-ce bien toi que j'ai tuée?
La mer blême asperge la nuit,
L'éclair fend la noire nuée.

Est-ce bien toi que j'ai tuée?
C'était le destin, je t'aimais!
L'éclair fend la noire nuée,
L'abîme s'ouvre pour jamais.

C'était le destin, je t'aimais!
Que je meure afin que j'oublie!
L'abîme s'ouvre pour jamais.
O mornes yeux! Lèvre pâlie!

It bleeds and swings upon the mast.
Her dying look still haunts my sight.
The storm-tossed proa plunges fast,
Our spray is flung upon the night.

Her dying look still haunts my sight.
—Can it be thou whom I have slain?
Our spray is flung upon the night;
The sky with lightning cleaves in twain.

Can it be thou whom I have slain?
I loved thee! Fate has written this!
The sky with lightning cleaves in twain.
Forever yawns the black abyss.

I loved thee! Fate has written this!
O death! O'er memory cast thy veil!
Forever yawns the black abyss.
O sightless eyes! O lips so pale!

LE SOMMEIL DU CONDOR

Par delà l'escalier des roides Cordillères,
Par delà les brouillards hantés des aigles noirs,
Plus hauts que les sommets creusés en entonnoirs
Où bout le flux sanglant des laves familières,
L'envergure pendante et rouge par endroits,
Le vaste Oiseau, tout plein d'une morne indolence,
Regarde l'Amérique et l'espace en silence,
Et le sombre soleil qui meurt dans ses yeux froids.
La nuit roule de l'Est, où les pampas sauvages
Sur les monts étagés s'élargissent sans fin;
Elle endort le Chili, les villes, les rivages,
Et la mer Pacifique et l'horizon divin;
Du continent muet elle s'est emparée:
Des sables aux coteaux, des gorges aux versants,
De cime en cime, elle enfle, en tourbillons croissants,
Le lourd débordement de sa haute marée.
Lui, comme un spectre, seul, au front du pic altier,
Baigné d'une lueur qui saigne sur la neige,
Il attend cette mer sinistre qui l'assiège:
Elle arrive, déferle, et le couvre en entier.
Dans l'abîme sans fond la Croix australe allume
Sur les côtes du ciel son phare constellé.
Il râle de plaisir, il agite sa plume,
Il érige son cou musculeux et pelé,
Il s'enlève en fouettant l'âpre neige des Andes,
Dans un cri rauque il monte où n'atteint pas le vent,
Et, loin du globe noir, loin de l'astre vivant,
Il dort dans l'air glacé, les ailes toutes grandes.

THE CONDOR'S SLEEP

Beyond the Cordillera's giant stairs,
Above the mists where black-winged eagles soar,
Above the lofty crater's sunken core,
Where flowing lava boils with blood-red flares,
The huge Bird sadly, indolently flies,
With ruddy wings outstretched that hang in air,
And sweeps America with silent stare,
And somber dying sun with glassy eyes.
Across the Eastern Pampas that expand
Beneath the terraced Andes endlessly,
Comes night o'er Chile, lulling all the land,
The sleeping cities, and the far-off sea;
It clasps the quiet continent so wide:
From shore to slope, from gorge to highest crest,
From peak to peak it swells with dark unrest
The heavy overflowing of its tide.
And he, a lonely spectre, there on high,
Bathed with a light that bleeds upon the snow,
Awaits that gloomy ocean's mighty flow.
It reaches him, and hides him from the eye.
The Southern Cross, above the gulf of night,
Flashes its beacon from the coasts of air.
He moves his wings and cries with hoarse delight,
He lifts his long neck, muscular and bare,
He whips the air above the snowy steeps,
To where no wind may rise, and soars afar
Above the darkened globe, the living star:
With wings outspread, in icy air he sleeps.

LES MONTREURS

Tel qu'un morne animal, meurtri, plein de poussière,
La chaîne au cou, hurlant au chaud soleil d'été,
Promène qui voudra son cœur ensanglanté
Sur ton pavé cynique, ô plèbe carnassière!

Pour mettre un feu stérile en ton œil hébété,
Pour mendier ton rire ou ta pitié grossière,
Déchire qui voudra la robe de lumière
De la pudeur divine et de la volupté.

Dans mon orgueil muet, dans ma tombe sans gloire,
Dussé-je m'engloutir pour l'éternité noire,
Je ne te vendrai pas mon ivresse ou mon mal,

Je ne livrerai pas ma vie à tes huées,
Je ne danserai pas sur ton tréteau banal
Avec tes histrions et tes prostituées.

SHOWMEN

Like some chained beast, begrimed with dust, and cowed,
That howls beneath the fierce sun, stung with flies,
Let him who will, proclaim his heartwrung cries
Within thy market place, O savage crowd!

To light with sterile fire thy stupid eyes,
And beg thy pity or thy laughter loud,
Let him who will, dispel the radiant cloud
Of sacred modesty where sweet love lies.

In silent pride, within a nameless tomb,
If I must lie engulfed in darkest doom,
Thou canst not buy my wild joy, nor my wound.

Thou canst not greet my life with shouts and hoots,
I will not dance upon thy vulgar ground
With all thy mountebanks and prostitutes.

LA TRISTESSE DU DIABLE

Silencieux, les poings aux dents, le dos ployé,
Enveloppé du noir manteau de ses deux ailes,
Sur un pic hérissé de neiges éternelles,
Une nuit, s'arrêta l'antique Foudroyé.

La terre prolongeait en bas, immense et sombre,
Les continents battus par la houle des mers;
Au-dessus flamboyait le ciel plein d'univers;
Mais lui ne regardait que l'abîme de l'ombre.

Il était là, dardant ses yeux ensanglantés
Dans ce gouffre où la vie amasse ses tempêtes,
Où le fourmillement des hommes et des bêtes
Pullule sous le vol des siècles irrités.

Il entendait monter les hosannas serviles,
Le cri des égorgeurs, les *Te Deum* des rois,
L'appel désespéré des nations en croix
Et des justes râlant sur le fumier des villes.

Ce lugubre concert du mal universel,
Aussi vieux que le monde et que la race humaine,
Plus fort, plus acharné, plus ardent que sa haine,
Tourbillonait autour du sinistre Immortel.

Il remonta d'un bond vers les temps insondables
Où sa gloire allumait le céleste matin,
Et, devant la stupide horreur de son destin,
Un grand frisson courut dans ses reins formidables.

THE GLOOM OF SATAN

Silent, with fist by jowl, and arching back,
Upon a lofty, bristling peak, one night
The ancient Evil One suspended flight,
Wrapped in his wings, a cloak of jetty black.

Below, the earth unfolds, gigantic arc,
In continents encircled by the deep;
Above, the world-filled heaven's flaming sweep.
His glance seeks only the abysmal dark.

Into the gulf with bloodshot eyes he peers,
Where life is ever gathering its storms,
Where men and beasts increase in seething swarms,
Beneath the headlong flight of angry years.

He hears hosannas servile as the dust,
Te Deums of the kings, assassins' cries,
And nations in despair; he hears arise
From city slums the death-groans of the just.

Old as the human race, the earth, the sun,
The mournful symphony of evil fate,
Stronger and madder, fiercer than his hate,
Exalts the sinister Immortal One.

His thought leaps back through time's obscure confine,
When his celestial lamp illumed the morn.
Before the horror of his fate forlorn
A shudder runs along his rugged spine.

Et se tordant les bras, et crispant ses orteils,
Lui, le premier rêveur, la plus vieille victime,
Il cria par delà l'immensité sublime
Où déferle en brûlant l'écume des soleils:

—Les monotones jours, comme une horrible pluie,
S'amassent, sans l'emplir, dans mon éternité;
Force, orgueil, désespoir, tout n'est que vanité;
Et la fureur me pèse, et le combat m'ennuie.

Presque autant que l'amour la haine m'a menti:
J'ai bu toute la mer des larmes infécondes.
Tombez, écrasez-moi, foudres, monceaux des mondes,
Dans le sommeil sacré que je sois englouti!

Et les lâches heureux, et les races damnées,
Par l'espace éclatant qui n'a ni fond ni bord,
Entendront une voix disant: Satan est mort!
Et ce sera ta fin, Œuvre des six journées!—

With writhing toes and clenched, extended fist,
He, the first dreamer, first to know disgrace,
Cries out beyond the vast expanse of space,
Where distant suns dissolve in burning mist:

"Eternally in never ending flight
My days are like a ghastly leaden rain.
Strength, pride, despair, surely all, all is vain.
I'm tired of fury, weary of the fight.

"Hatred as much as love has lied to me.
I've drunk of sterile tears the sea entire.
Crush me, O mass of worlds, consume me, fire!
Engulfed in sacred sleep I fain would be.

"And all the happy cowards that kiss the rod,
Shall hear through space unbounded, dazzling spread,
A voice of thunder crying, 'Satan's dead!'
—'Twill be thine end, O six day Work of God!"

LE SOIR D'UNE BATAILLE

Tels que la haute mer contre les durs rivages,
A la grande tuerie ils se sont tous rués,
Ivres et haletants, par les boulets troués,
En d'épais tourbillons pleins de clameurs sauvages.

Sous un large soleil d'été, de l'aube au soir,
Sans relâche, fauchant les blés, brisant les vignes,
Longs murs d'hommes, ils ont poussés leurs sombres lignes,
Et là par blocs entiers, ils se sont laissés choir.

Puis ils se sont liés en étreintes féroces,
Le souffle au souffle uni, l'œil de haine chargé.
Le fer d'un sang fièvreux, à l'aise s'est gorgé ;
La cervelle a jailli sous la lourdeur des crosses.

Victorieux, vaincus, fantassins, cavaliers,
Les voici maintenant, blêmes, muets, farouches,
Les poings fermés, serrant les dents, et les yeux louches,
Dans la mort furieuse étendus par milliers.

La pluie, avec lenteur lavant leurs pâles faces,
Aux pentes du terrain fait murmurer ses eaux ;
Et par la morne plaine où tourne un vol d'oiseaux
Le ciel d'un soir sinistre estompe au loin leurs masses.

Tous les cris se sont tus, les râles sont poussés.
Sur le sol bossué de tant de chair humaine,
Aux dernières lueurs du jour on voit à peine
Se tordre vaguement des corps entrelacés ;

THE EVENING OF A BATTLE

Like sea-waves dashing o'er the rocky sands,
Into the mighty killing flung pell mell,
Intoxicated, panting, torn by shell,
With savage cries they whirled in serried bands.

From dawn to dusk, beneath the summer sky,
Trampling the wheat, and breaking down the vines,
In living walls they pushed their somber lines,
And there, in masses fell, where still they lie.

And then, in fierce embrace they rushed to lock
Themselves, and glare with hatred, breath to breath.
Their steel had gorged its fill of blood and death,
And brains were dashed 'neath heavy rifle-stock.

The victors, vanquished, horsemen, infantry:
Behold them! Pale and silent, thousands lie,
With fist and jaw clenched hard; and gaze on high
With ghastly staring eyes that cannot see.

Their pallid faces glisten with the rain
That slowly murmurs, till in evening shades
Of twilight sinister each body fades.
A flight of ravens rises from the plain.

The cries and groans of death have been effaced.
Amidst grim mounds of flesh and war debris,
As night comes on one still can dimly see
Some bodies vaguely writhing, interlaced.

Et là-bas, du milieu de ce massacre immense,
Dressant son cou roidi, percé de coups de feu,
Un cheval jette au vent un rauque et triste adieu
Que la nuit fait courir à travers le silence.

O boucherie! ô soif du meurtre! acharnement
Horrible! odeur des morts qui suffoques et navres!
Soyez maudits devant ces cent mille cadavres
Et la stupide horreur de cet égorgement.

Mais, sous l'ardent soleil ou sur la plaine noire,
Si, heurtant de leur cœur la gueule du canon,
Ils sont morts, Liberté, ces braves, en ton nom,
Béni soit le sang pur qui fume vers ta gloire!

And yonder, 'mid the massacre, in fright,
Raising its bleeding neck from where it fell,
A horse is whinnying a last farewell,
That echoes through the silence of the night.

O butchery! O lust for blood insane,
With stifling stench of corpses, frightful thirst
For murder—stupid horror be accursed,
Before these hundred thousand madly slain!

But yet, on blackened fields, in sun and flame,
Crushing their hearts on cannon, Liberty,
If all these brave men gave their lives for thee,
Blessèd their blood, as incense to thy fame!

LE CŒUR DE HIALMAR

Une nuit claire. Un vent glacé. La neige est rouge.
Mille braves sont là qui dorment sans tombeaux
L'épée au poing, les yeux hagards. Pas un ne bouge.
Au-dessus tourne et crie un vol de noirs corbeaux.

La lune froide verse au loin sa pâle flamme.
Hialmar se soulève entre les morts sanglants,
Appuyé des deux mains au tronçon de sa lame.
La pourpre du combat ruisselle de ses flancs.

—Holà! Quelqu'un a-t-il encore un peu d'haleine,
Parmi tant de joyeux et robustes garçons
Qui, ce matin, riaient et chantaient à voix pleine
Comme des merles dans l'épaisseur des buissons?

Tous sont muets. Mon casque est rompu, mon armure
Est trouée, et la hache a fait sauter ses clous.
Mes yeux saignent. J'entends un immense murmure
Pareil aux hurlements de la mer ou des loups.

Viens par ici, Corbeau, mon brave mangeur d'hommes!
Ouvre-moi la poitrine avec ton bec de fer.
Tu nous retrouveras demain tels que nous sommes.
Porte mon cœur tout chaud à la fille d'Ylmer.

Dans Upsal, où les Jarls boivent la bonne bière,
Et chantent, en heurtant les cruches d'or, en chœur,
A tire d'aile vole, ô rôdeur de bruyère!
Cherche ma fiancée et porte-lui mon cœur.

THE HEART OF HIALMAR

A clear night. Freezing wind. The snow is red.
A thousand sleeping braves unburied lie,
With swords clenched firm. None stir, they all are dead.
Above them somber ravens wheel and cry.

The cold moon faintly lights the distant lands.
Hialmar lifts himself—the rest have died—
And leans on broken blade with both his hands;
A stream of crimson gushes from his side.

"Holà! Have any of you still a voice,
Among so many stalwart, merry men
Who sang so loud this morning, to rejoice
Like blackbirds piping in a wooded glen?

"None speak. My helmet's broken, armor ground
To bits beneath the axe that clove the nails.
My eyes are bleeding. Hark the mighty sound,
Like howling of the sea, or wolves' fierce wails!

"O Raven, come, O thou who eatest men!
With beak of steel come tear my breast apart.
We'll be the same tomorrow. Bear thou, then,
To her I love, my staunchly beating heart.

"At Upsal where the Jarls are drinking ale,
Singing and clinking golden cups all day,
O heather-rover, fly and without fail
Carry my heart to her, my fiancée.

Au sommet de la tour que hantent les corneilles
Tu la verras debout, blanche, aux longs cheveux noirs.
Deux anneaux d'argent fin lui pendent aux oreilles,
Et ses yeux sont plus clairs que l'astre des beaux soirs.

Va sombre messager, dis-lui bien que je l'aime,
Et que voici mon cœur. Elle reconnaîtra
Qu'il est rouge et solide et non tremblant et blême;
Et la fille d'Ylmer, Corbeau, te sourira!

Moi, je meurs. Mon esprit coule par vingt blessures.
J'ai fait mon temps. Buvez, ô loups, mon sang vermeil.
Jeune, brave, riant, libre et sans flétrissures,
Je vais m'asseoir parmi les Dieux, dans le soleil!

"Thou'lt see her standing pale, with jetty hair,
Aloft a tower where crows fly, gazing far.
Her earrings are of silver, fine and fair;
Her eyes are clearer than the evening star.

"Tell her, O Raven, that I love her dear,
And send my heart still warm, that she may see
'Tis red and firm, and does not shake with fear;
And Ylmer's daughter, Bird, will smile on thee.

"I die. From twenty wounds my spirits flow.
Drink my red blood, O wolves. My race is run.
Young, brave, and laughing free, unscarred I go
To sit among the Gods, within the sun!"

LES HURLEURS

Le soleil dans les flots avait noyé ses flammes,
La ville s'endormait aux pieds des monts brumeux.
Sur de grands rocs lavés d'un nuage écumeux
La mer sombre en grondant versait ses hautes lames.

La nuit multipliait ce long gémissement.
Nul astre ne luisait dans l'immensité nue;
Seule, la lune pâle, en écartant la nue,
Comme une morne lampe oscillait tristement.

Monde muet, marqué d'un signe de colère,
Débris d'un globe mort au hasard dispersé,
Elle laissait tomber de son orbe glacé
Un reflet sépulcral sur l'océan polaire.

Sans borne, assise au Nord, sous les cieux étouffants,
L'Afrique, s'abritant d'ombre épaisse et de brume,
Affamait ses lions dans le sable qui fume,
Et couchait près des lacs ses troupeaux d'éléphants.

Mais sur la plage aride, aux odeurs insalubres,
Parmi des ossements de bœufs et de chevaux,
De maigres chiens, épars, allongeant leurs museaux,
Se lamentaient, poussant des hurlements lugubres.

La queue en cercle sous leurs ventres palpitants,
L'œil dilaté, tremblant sur leurs pattes fébriles,
Accroupis çà et là, tous hurlaient, immobiles,
Et d'un frisson rapide agités par instants.

L'écume de la mer collait sur leurs échines
De longs poils qui laissaient les vertèbres saillir;
Et, quand les flots par bonds les venaient assaillir,
Leurs dents blanches claquaient sous leurs rouges babines.

NIGHT WAILS

The waves had drowned the sun as twilight fell.
The city slept below the mountains gray;
Against the rocks enwrapped in clouds of spray,
The somber sea had poured its lofty swell.

The night re-echoed with the sea's sad tone,
No stars appeared within the wide, dark sky;
Alone among the clouds the moon, on high,
As though a doleful lantern, dully shone.

A silent world, reflecting only wrath,
A lifeless globe, dispersed in mere debris.
The frigid moonbeams cast across the sea
A melancholy, pale, sepulchral path.

Beyond, beneath a misty, sultry sky,
Africa hid in darkness all her land,
—Her hungry lions, 'mid the smoking sand,
And herds of elephants, where still lakes lie.

Along the sandy beach, with gruesome scent,
Among the bones of horses white and bare,
Some lean dogs raised their muzzles here and there,
And howled a sad, lugubrious lament.

Between their shivering legs they hid their tails.
Their staring eyes betokened deep distress.
Suddenly quivering, crouching motionless,
They uttered through the darkness mournful wails.

The sea-foam slithered each projecting spine,
Their shaggy hair, and fevered, restless paws.
Their white teeth chattered in their crimson jaws,
Each time the leaping billows hurled their brine.

Devant la lune errante aux livides clartés,
Quelle angoisse inconnue, au bord des noires ondes,
Faisait pleurer une âme en vos formes immondes?
Pourquoi gémissiez-vous, spectres épouvantés?

Je ne sais; mais, ô chiens qui hurliez sur les plages,
Après tant de soleils qui ne reviendront plus,
J'entends toujours, du fond de mon passé confus,
Le cri désespéré de vos douleurs sauvages!

Before the changing moon's unearthly light,
What secret anguish, there amid the storms,
Made souls lament within your filthy forms?
Why did you moan, O specters, torn with fright?

Dogs of that gloomy shore, I know not why,
But after all these many vanished years,
There still is dimly ringing in my ears,
The savage grief of your despairing cries!

L'ORBE D'OR

L'orbe d'or du soleil tombé des cieux sans bornes
S'enfonce avec lenteur dans l'immobile mer,
Et pour suprême adieu baigne d'un rose éclair
Le givre qui pétille à la cime des mornes.

En un mélancolique et languissant soupir,
Le vent des hauts, le long des ravins emplis d'ombres,
Agite doucement les tamariniers sombres
Où les oiseaux siffleurs viennent de s'assoupir.

Parmi les caféiers et les cannes mûries,
Les effluves du sol, comme d'un encensoir,
S'exhalent en mêlant dans le souffle du soir
A l'arome des bois l'odeur des sucreries.

Une étoile jaillit du bleu noir de la nuit,
Toute vive, et palpite en sa blancheur de perle;
Puis la mer des soleils et des mondes déferle
Et flambe sur les flots que sa gloire éblouit.

Et l'âme, qui contemple, et soi-même s'oublie
Dans la splendide paix du silence divin,
Sans regrets ni désirs, sachant que tout est vain,
En un rêve éternel s'abîme ensevelie.

THE GOLDEN ORB

The golden sun from out the boundless sky
Is slowly sinking in the quiet swell,
Its rosy light, in sign of last farewell,
Is sparkling o'er the snowy peaks on high.

As though a melancholy, languid sigh,
Along the dark ravines, the mountain breeze
Descends and softly shakes the tam'rind trees,
Where sounds of whistling warblers slowly die.

The smell of warm, moist earth, like incense there
Among the coffee trees and ripened cane,
The fragrance of the sugar mills, of plain
And woods, are mingled in the evening air.

And suddenly, against the blue of night,
A star appears, and trembles, white like pearls,
And then the sea of suns and worlds unfurls,
And dazzled waves reflect their splend'rous light.

And gazing silently, the spirit seems
To lose itself, in peace, released from pain;
And god-like, knowing everything is vain,
It plunges deep in everlasting dreams.

LE DERNIER SOUVENIR

J'ai vécu, je suis mort.—Les yeux ouverts, je coule
Dans l'incommensurable abîme, sans rien voir,
Lent comme une agonie et lourd comme une foule.

Inerte, blême, au fond d'un lugubre entonnoir
Je descends d'heure en heure et d'année en année,
A travers le Muet, l'Immobile, le Noir.

Je songe, et ne sens plus. L'épreuve est terminée.
Qu'est-ce donc que la vie? Étais-je jeune ou vieux?
Soleil! Amour!—Rien, rien. Va, chair abandonnée!

Tournoie, enfonce, va! Le vide est dans tes yeux,
Et l'oubli s'épaissit et t'absorbe à mesure.
Si je rêvais! Non, non, je suis bien mort. Tant mieux.

Mais ce spectre, ce cri, cette horrible blessure?
Cela dut m'arriver en des temps très anciens.
O nuit! Nuit du néant, prends-moi!—La chose est sûre:

Quelqu'un m'a dévoré le cœur. Je me souviens.

THE LAST MEMORY

I've lived, I've died!—With open eyes, I flow
Through gulfs unfathomed that I cannot see,
Inert and pale, descending heavy, slow.

In gloomy spirals, slow as agony,
Hourly, and yearly, deeper I descend,
Through Silence, Blackness, Nothingness below.

I dream, but feel no more, nor need contend.
What's life, I wonder? Was I young or old?
Sunlight! And love!—No, nothing. 'Tis the end.

So plunge and circle, come! You've lost all hold;
Each day your memories more dimly wane.
Is it a dream? No, no. I'm dead, I'm cold.

And yet this ghost, this cry, this frightful pain?
It must have happened oh so long ago.
O Night! Oblivion, take me!—All is plain:

Someone devoured my heart. I know, I know.

LA PANTHÈRE NOIRE

Une rose lueur s'épand par les nuées;
L'horizon se dentelle, à l'Est, d'un vif éclair;
Et le collier nocturne, en perles dénouées,
S'égrène et tombe dans la mer.

Toute une part du ciel se vêt de molles flammes
Qu'il agrafe à son faîte étincelant et bleu.
Un pan traîne et rougit l'émeraude des lames
D'une pluie aux gouttes de feu.

Des bambous éveillés où le vent bat des ailes,
Des letchis au fruit pourpre et des canneliers
Pétille la rosée en gerbes d'étincelles,
Montent des bruits frais par milliers.

Et des monts et des bois, des fleurs, des hautes mousses,
Dans l'air tiède et subtil, brusquement dilaté,
S'épanouit un flot d'odeurs fortes et douces,
Plein de fièvre et de volupté.

Par les sentiers perdus au creux des forêts vierges
Où l'herbe épaisse fume au soleil du matin;
Le long des cours d'eau vive encaissés dans leurs berges,
Sous de verts arceaux de rotin;

La reine de Java, la noire chasseresse,
Avec l'aube, revient au gîte où ses petits
Parmi les os luisants miaulent de détresse,
Les uns sous les autres blottis.

THE BLACK PANTHER

The Eastern sky is filled with rosy light,
From jagged cloud-line fiery from the sun;
And scattered pearls, the necklace of the night,
Are falling seaward, one by one.

And flaming over heaven's blue serene,
The dazzling dawn is rising ever higher,
And staining red the waves of emerald green,
With rain of tiny flakes of fire.

A thousand merry voices greet the breeze,
That takes its flight, and wakes the slim bamboo.
Shaken from cinnamon and letchy trees,
In showers of gay sparks falls the dew.

From mount and wood, from flowers, from mosses long,
Filling the warm moist air, there comes to us
A sudden flood of odors, sweet and strong,
Feverishly voluptuous.

Where tangled grasses steam in morning sun,
By secret forest paths unknown to man,
Along the streams half hidden where they run,
Beneath the arching green rattan;

At dawn the ebon huntress, Java's queen,
Returns, amid the polished bones, where call
Her young, with pangs of hunger sharp and keen,
Rolling together in a ball.

Inquiète, les yeux aigus comme des flèches,
Elle ondule, épiant l'ombre des rameaux lourds.
Quelques taches de sang, éparses, toutes fraiches,
Mouillent sa robe de velours.

Elle traîne après elle un reste de sa chasse,
Un quartier du beau cerf qu'elle a mangé la nuit;
Et sur la mousse en fleur un effroyable trace
Rouge, et chaude encore, la suit.

Autour, les papillons et les fauves abeilles
Effleurent à l'envi son dos souple du vol;
Les feuillages joyeux de leurs mille corbeilles
Sur ses pas parfument le sol.

Le python du milieu d'un cactus écarlate,
Déroule son écaille, et curieux témoin,
Par-dessus les buissons dressant sa tête plate,
La regarde passer de loin.

Sous la haute fougère elle glisse en silence,
Parmi les troncs moussus s'enfonce et disparaît.
Les bruits cessent, l'air brûle, et la lumière immense
Endort le ciel et la forêt.

She undulates, and eyes the denser shade
With restless glance as piercing as a probe.
Some scattered blood stains, moist and freshly made,
Besmear the panther's velvet robe.

She drags along the moss her mangled prey,
A handsome deer in part devoured that night,
And leaves a frightful trail along the way,
A crimson line, still warm and bright.

Around her, butterflies and tawny bees
Are freely skimming o'er her supple back;
The merry blossoms of the flowers and trees
Perfume the ground along her track.

The python, from a scarlet cactus bed,
Uncoils his scales, and curiously peers
Above the bushes, raising his flat head
And watching till she disappears.

She slinks in silence underneath the ferns,
Among the mossy tree-trunks plunging deep.
All voices cease; the vast light blinds and burns;
And sky and forest seem to sleep.

LA VÉRANDAH

Au tintement de l'eau dans les porphyres roux
Les rosiers de l'Iran mêlent leurs frais murmures,
Et les ramiers rêveurs leurs roucoulements doux.
Tandis que l'oiseau grêle et le frelon jaloux,
Sifflant et bourdonnant, mordent les figues mûres,
Les rosiers de l'Iran mêlent leurs frais murmures
Au tintement de l'eau dans les porphyres roux.

Sous les treillis d'argent de la vérandah close,
Dans l'air tiède embaumé de l'odeur des jasmins,
Où la splendeur du jour darde une flèche rose,
La Persane royale, immobile, repose,
Derrière son col brun croisant ses belles mains,
Dans l'air tiède, embaumé de l'odeur des jasmins,
Sous les treillis d'argent de la vérandah close.

Jusqu'aux lèvres que l'ambre arrondi baise encor,
Du cristal d'où s'échappe une vapeur subtile
Qui monte en tourbillons légers et prend l'essor,
Sur les coussins de soie écarlate, aux fleurs d'or,
La branche du hûka rôde comme un reptile
Du cristal d'où s'échappe une vapeur subtile
Jusqu'aux lèvres que l'ambre arrondi baise encor.

Deux rayons noirs, chargés d'une muette ivresse,
Sortent de ses longs yeux entr'ouverts à demi;
Un songe l'enveloppe, un souffle la caresse;
Et parce que l'effluve invincible l'oppresse,

THE VERANDAH

Where tinkling streams from porph'ry founts are heard
Above the dreamy coo of doves that come
Among the Persian roses, gently stirred;
While jealous wasp and tiny hummingbird
Bite at the ripened figs, and shrilly hum,
Above the dreamy coo of doves that come
Where tinkling streams from porph'ry founts are heard.

Behind the closed verandah's silver grille,
The fragrant smell of jasmin fills the air,
Where rosy light is slanting o'er the sill,
The royal Persian rests, reclining, still,
With fingers clasped behind her neck so fair.
The fragrant smell of jasmin fills the air,
Behind the closed verandah's silver grille.

To lips by rounded amber softly kissed,
From crystal bowl where filmy smoke-wreaths rise,
In slender lines of curling, bluish mist,
The huka's coils, like snakes that turn and twist,
Wind where the silken scarlet cushion lies,
From crystal bowl where filmy smoke-wreaths rise,
To lips by rounded amber softly kissed.

Her glance with mute intoxication gleams,
Her almond eyes with languor almost close;
A breeze caresses her, enwrapped in dreams,
Its perfume drowns her senses, and it seems

Parce que son beau sein qui se gonfle a frémi,
Sortent de ses longs yeux entr'ouverts à demi
Deux rayons noirs, chargés d'une muette ivresse.

Et l'eau vive s'endort dans les porphyres roux,
Les rosiers de l'Iran ont cessé leurs murmures,
Et les ramiers rêveurs leurs roucoulements doux.
Tout se tait. L'oiseau grêle et le frelon jaloux
Ne se querellent plus autour des figues mûres.
Les rosiers de l'Iran ont cessé leurs murmures,
Et l'eau vive s'endort dans les porphyres roux.

To send a shiver o'er her as it goes.
Her almond eyes with languor almost close;
Her glance with mute intoxication gleams.

And now no more the tinkling streams are heard,
For all things sleep. The doves no longer come;
The Persian roses by no winds are stirred;
The jealous wasp and tiny hummingbird
Around the ripened figs have ceased their hum,
For all things sleep. The doves no longer come,
And now no more the tinkling streams are heard.

VILE POTABIS

En mes coupes d'un prix modique
Veux-tu tenter mon humble vin?
Je l'ai scellé dans l'urne Attique
Au sortir du pressoir Sabin.
Il est un peu rude et moderne;
Cécube, Calès ni Falerne
Ne mûrissent dans mon cellier;
Mais les Muses me sont amies,
Et les Muses font oublier
Ta vigne dorée, ô Formies!

VILE POTABIS

Though served in cups of modest clay,
Would'st try my humble wine, O guest?
In Grecian urn 'twas sealed away,
In Sabine vineyard freshly pressed.
It still is somewhat harsh and young;
Falernians of which I've sung
Age not within my cellar; yet
The Muses all are friends of mine,
And Muses make one soon forget,
O Formiæ, thy golden vine!

LA MAYA

Maya! Maya! torrent des mobiles chimères,
Tu fais jaillir du cœur de l'homme universel
Les brèves voluptés et les haines amères,
Le monde obscur des sens et la splendeur du ciel;
Mais qu'est-ce que le cœur des hommes éphémères,
O Maya! sinon toi, le mirage immortel?
Les siècles écoulés, les minutes prochaines,
S'abîment dans ton ombre, en un même moment,
Avec nos cris, nos pleurs et le sang de nos veines:
Éclair, rêve sinistre, éternité qui ment,
La Vie antique est faite inépuisablement
Du tourbillon sans fin des apparences vaines.

MAYA

O Maya, Maya, flood of living dreams,
You conjure from all hearts eternally
Our briefest pleasures, hatred's bitter gleams,
The clouded world of sense, the dazzling sea.
But is man's changing heart the thing it seems?
Mirage immortal, Maya, 'tis but thee!
The vanished ages, time's immediate streams,
Engulfed at once in thy deep shadows flee.
The blood within our veins, our tears, our screams,
O ghastly vision, false eternity!
Our ancient Life is made unceasingly
Of endless eddyings of empty dreams.

MIDI

Midi, roi des étés, épandu sur la plaine,
Tombe en nappes d'argent des hauteurs du ciel bleu.
Tout se tait. L'air flamboie et brûle sans haleine;
La terre est assoupie en sa robe de feu.

L'étendue est immense, et les champs n'ont point d'ombre,
Et la source est tarie où buvaient les troupeaux;
La lointaine forêt, dont la lisière est sombre,
Dort là-bas, immobile, en un pesant repos.

Seuls, les grands blés mûris, tels qu'une mer dorée,
Se déroulent au loin, dédaigneux du sommeil;
Pacifiques enfants de la terre sacrée,
Ils épuisent sans peur la coupe du soleil.

Parfois, comme un soupir de leur âme brûlante,
Du sein des épis lourds qui murmurent entre eux,
Une ondulation majestueuse et lente
S'éveille, et va mourir à l'horizon poudreux.

Non loin, quelques bœufs blancs, couchés parmi les herbes,
Bavent avec lenteur sur leurs fanons épais,
Et suivent de leurs yeux languissants et superbes
Le songe intérieur qu'ils n'achèvent jamais.

Homme, si, le cœur plein de joie ou d'amertume,
Tu passais vers midi dans les champs radieux,
Fuis! la nature est vide et le soleil consume:
Rien n'est vivant ici, rien n'est triste ou joyeux.

NOONTIDE

Flooding the plain, the king of summer, Noon,
Descends in silver sheets from cloudless sky.
The earth, in fiery garments, seems to swoon;
The flaming air is breathless. Noises die.

The plain is vast; for miles no shade is seen.
The spring where cattle drank, no longer flows.
The distant forest, edged with somber green,
Is sleeping motionless in deep repose.

Only the ripened wheat, a golden sea,
Extending far away, disdains to sleep;
The sacred earth's calm daughter, fearlessly
Receives the cup of sunlight, drinking deep.

At times the wheat stalks bend and whisper low;
Their burning bosom heaves a heartfelt sigh,
And undulations roll, majestic, slow,
To the horizon, where they dimly die.

Near-by, amid the grass, some oxen lie,
And, slowly slavering their dewlaps, seem
To follow with a large and languid eye,
Their placid, never ending inner dream.

With heart still fixed on merriment or gloom,
If thou shouldst pass at noon this radiant plain,
Depart! For nature's empty, suns consume;
Thou'lt find no life here, hope, nor even pain.

Mais si, désabusé des larmes et du rire,
Altéré de l'oubli de ce monde agité,
Tu veux, ne sachant plus pardonner ou maudire,
Goûter une suprême et morne volupté,

Viens! Le soleil te parle en paroles sublimes;
Dans la flamme implacable absorbe-toi sans fin;
Et retourne à pas lents vers les cités infimes,
Le cœur trempé sept fois dans le néant divin.

However, if thou'rt longing to forget,
If tears and laughter have begun to cloy,
Unable to forgive or curse, and yet
Desire a crowning, melancholy joy,

Come bathe in burning light that knows no end,
Sublimely heed the language of the sun.
Then cityward thy lagging footsteps wend,
Divinely steeped in deep oblivion.

SOLEILS! POUSSIÈRE D'OR . . .

Soleils! Poussière d'or éparse aux nuits sublimes
Où l'esprit éperdu s'envole et plonge en vain!
Vous épanchez sur nous, du fond de bleus abîmes,
La bienheureuse paix du silence divin,
Soleils! Poussière d'or éparse aux nuits sublimes:

Mais qui sait, ô splendeurs, ravissement des yeux,
Qui déroulez sans fin vos spirales sacrées
Dans l'infini désir d'un but mystérieux,
Qui sait, si, loin de nous, des voix déespérées
Des plus amers sanglots ne troublent pas vos cieux?

Enfers ou Paradis des espaces sublimes,
Tels que nous qui passons ombres d'un songe vain,
L'inévitable Mort, d'abîmes en abîmes
Vous entraîne à jamais vers le Néant divin,
Enfers ou Paradis des espaces sublimes!

Ivres et haletants, portés de ciel en ciel
Par l'aveugle et fougueux torrent des Destinées,
Pourquoi jaillissez-vous du Vide originel?
Que sont des milliards de milliards d'années,
Quand vient l'heure où tout rentre au repos éternel?

Soleils, Mondes, Amour, illusions sublimes,
Désirs, splendeurs! si tout est éphémère et vain
Dans nos cœurs aussi bien qu'en vos profonds abîmes,
Votre instant est sacré, votre rêve est divin,
Soleils, Mondes, Amour, illusions sublimes!

SUNS! GOLDEN GRAINS . . .

Suns! Golden grains that strew the floor of night,
Where plunging all in vain our spirits fly!
From out the blue abyss you shed the light
Of happy, silent peace in which we lie.
Suns! Golden grains that strew the floor of night:

Who knows, O splendors, ravishing our eyes,
Whirling in sacred spirals endlessly,
With infinite desire toward other skies,
Who knows what voices stung with cruelty
Trouble the far-off space with bitter cries?

Heavens or Hells that fill the sky with light,
Like us vain shadows, dreams that soon must fly,
Inevitable Death, abyss of night
Will drag you to oblivion; you'll die,
Heavens or Hells that fill the sky with light!

Drunken, and panting, borne from sky to sky,
By streams of destiny that rush along,
Why did you rise from primal Space, O why?
What are a billion years? 'Twill not seem long,
At last, when all created things must die.

Suns, Worlds, and Love, sublime Illusions, Light,
Though all is vain—desire, the stars that shine,
Our hearts, and you within the depths of night—
Your hour is sacred, and your dream divine,
Suns, Worlds, and Love, sublime Illusions, Light!

Croulez donc dans la nuit du Gouffre illimité,
Mondes! Vivants soleils, éteignez donc vos flammes!
Et toi, qui fais un Dieu de l'homme, ô volupté,
Amour! Tu peux mourir, ô lumière des âmes,
Car ton rapide éclair contient l'éternité.

Sink in the boundless Gulf, descend and flee,
O Worlds! O living Suns grow dark as night!
And you, O Love, who makes man godlike, free!
O Love! You too may die, O spirit's light—
Your rapid flare contains eternity.

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INDEX

A

Adamolle, 20, 36.
Albatros (*L'*) 8.
Anacreontic Odes, 156.
Anathème (*L'*) 157.
Annunzio (D') 69.
Aristotle, 104.
Arnold of Brescia, 37.
Arnold, Matthew, IX.
Art pour l'art (L') 51–52.
Aubigny (D') 133.
Augier, 47.
Aux Modernes, 157.
Avenir de la Science (*L'*) 60.

B

Baiser Suprême (*Le*) 96–98.
Ballet des Sylphes (*Le*) 102.
Balzac, 47.
Banville, Théodore de, 71, 75, 115.
Barye, 149.
Baudelaire, 22, 26, 34, 49, 50, 54, 56, 57, 77, 140, 178, 180.
Beatitudes, 173.
Beatrice, 24, 87.
Bécquer, Gustavo, 7, 98, 106.
Beethoven, 183.
Bédier, J., 18.
Béranger, 31.
Bergson, 64, 129, 153.
Berkeley, 47.
Bernica (*Le*) 125.
Berlioz, 71, 102.
Bible (*The*) 68, 74, 121, 130, 173.
Birds, Insects, Mountains, 60.
Boccaccio, 100.
Boissier, Gaston, 62.
Bonie Doon, 106.
Bossuet, 137.
Bouilhet, Louis, 62.
Brunetière, 107, 108, 141, 142, 152, 154, 183.
Bucke (Dr.) 162.
Buddha, 37.
Burgraves (*Les*) 47.
Burnouf, Eugène, 62, 64.
Burns, 70, 105, 106.
Byron, 70, 115.

C

Calderón, 170.
Calmettes, 18.
Carducci, 6, 122, 128, 182.
Cassagne, 78.
Cesareo, 10.
Chant Alterné, 21.
Charogne (*Une*) 178.
Chateaubriand, 47, 62.
Châtiments (*Les*) 128.
Chinard, 148.
Christ, 5, 35, 37, 65, 132, 133, 134, 172.
Christine, 98–101.
Christophe, 96.
Classicism, 46.
Coeur de Hialmar (*Le*) 124, 175–176.
Comte, 7, 48.
Confucius, 37.
Considérant, Victor, 36.

Contemplation, 14.
Contemplations (*Les*) 183.
Corbeau (*Le*) 129–132.
Corneille, 11, 63, 73, 179.
Correspondence (Flaubert's) 60.
Cosmic Consciousness, 162.
Coulange, Fustel de, 62.
Croce, 9.
Çunacépa, 91–96, 171, 177.

D

Dames du Temps Jadis, 138.
Dans le ciel clair, 74, 144–145.
Dante, 4, 6, 20, 24, 49, 58, 64, 87, 88, 107, 108, 128, 133, 138, 173, 182.
Darío, Rubén, X, 116, 182.
Daudet, 99.
Delacroix, 149.
Démocratie Pacifique (*La*) 36, 45.
Départ (*Le*) 12, 13.
Derniers Poèmes, 158, 170.
Descartes, 7.
Descent from the Cross (*The*) 173.
Deux Amours (*Les*) 21.
Díaz, Leopoldo, X.
Diderot, 68.
Dies Iræ, 135–138.
Divine Comedy (*The*) 162.
Dodd, Walter James, 60.
Dornis, Jean, 20, 27, 87.
Dowden, Edward, 150.
Dumas fils, 47, 85.
Duval, 27.

E

Effets de lune, 8.
Eléphants (*Les*) 147, 149–150.
Elsenberg, 24, 34.
Emile, 29.
Épée d'Angantyr (*L'*) 108.
Épiphanie, 3, 87, 88.
Erlking (*The*) 101.
Esthetics (Croce's) 9.
Ethics of Spinoza (*The*) 169.
Évolution de la poésie lyrique (*L'*) 107.
Expiation (*L'*) 132.

F

Fall of Troy (*The*) 63.
Farinati, 58.
Faust, 58, 68.
Fay, Léontine, 17.
Fiat Nox, 75.
Fichte, 47.
First Poems, 14.
Flamands (*Les*) 180.
Flame of Life (*The*) 69.
Flaubert 52, 54, 55, 57, 60, 61, 68, 69, 77, 146.
Fontaine aux lianes (*La*) 168, 184.
France, Anatole, 129, 156.
Franck, César, 173.
Freudian psychology, 13, 97.
Fromentin, 71.

G

Gautier, Théophile, 1, 22, 25, 54, 55, 63, 71, 77, 79.
Ginestra (*La*) 10, 121.
Goethe, 69, 99, 101, 143.
Goncourt (The Brothers) 65, 71.
Gongorism, 1.
Goya, 97, 98.

Graziella, 47.
Greek Anthology (*The*) 68, 155.
Grierson, Francis, 5.
Guinaudeau, 12, 17.
Guitry, Sacha, 60.
Gutiérrez Nájera, X.

H

Hallucinations, 15.
Hearn, Lafcadio, 55, 64, 77.
Heine, 99, 101.
Helen (of Troy) 63, 110.
Heredia, 1, 152.
Hernani, 47.
History of Christianity, 43.
Homer, 173.
Horaces (*Les*) 11.
Houssaye, 18.
Hugo, IX, X, XI, 1, 5, 26, 27, 30, 47, 49, 50, 51, 62, 77, 128, 132, 133, 142, 180, 183.
Huret, Jules, 85.
Hurleurs (*Les*) 141–142.
Huss, 37.
Hymn to Beauty, 54.
Hypatie, 171–175.
Hypatie et Cyrille, 172.

I

Ile des Pinguoins (*L'*) 129.
Iliad (*The*) 173.
Illusion suprême (*L'*) 87, 88, 124, 138–140, 157, 176.
Inferno (*The*) 4.
Infinito (*L'*) 125.

J

Jaguar (*Le*) 153.
Jefferson, 124.
Job, 120, 121, 124, 143.
Julius Caesar, 77.
Justice and Right, 37.

K

Kallen, Horace, 159.
Kant, 11, 47.
Katharsis, 9, 104–105, 129, 144.
Keats, 155.
Khirôn, 108, 184.
Kléarista, 91.

L

Lac (*Le*) 144.
La Fontaine, 96, 148.
Lamartine, 26, 27, 47, 49, 53, 55, 144.
Lanson, 60.
Lanux, Genevieve, 3.
Lanux, Marquis de, 2.
La Rochefoucauld, 10, 14.
Laughter (Bergson's) 129.
Leblond, M. A., 16, 19, 36, 37, 69.
Le Braz, Anatole, XI.
Le Conte de Préval, 3.
Léliâ (*A*) 15.
Lemaître, Jules, 115.
Leopardi, 6, 59, 87, 121, 125, 181, 182.
Lettres Provinciales, 128.
Life of Leopardi, 10.
Lipsky, A., 76.
Lowell, Amy, 83.
Lucrèce, 47.

M

Maha-Bharata (*The*) 178.
Maison du Berger (*La*) 184.
Mallarmé, 180.
Manchy (*Le*) 85–88, 184.

Mannequin d'Osier (*Le*) 156.
Mare au Diable (*La*) 48.
Massacre de Mona (*Le*) 108.
Maya (*La*) 170.
McDougall, 10, 123.
Médailles Antiques, 155.
Méditations (*Les*) 183.
Ménard, Louis, 45, 62, 71, 172.
Mendès, Catulle, 79.
Michael Angelo, 27, 116, 183.
Michelet, 28, 60.
Midi, 124, 167–169.
Mille Ans Après, 140–141.
Milton, 6, 64, 122, 133, 173, 182, 183.
Misérables (*Les*) IX.
Mlle. de Maupin, 54, 63.
Mme. Bovary, 52.
Moïse, 61, 176.
Molière, 183.
Monet, Claude, 83.
Mon Premier amour en prose, 17.
Montagnes Natales (*Aux*) 15.
Mont des Oliviers (*Le*) 134, 161.
Montreurs (*Les*) 69, 70.
Moréas, Jean, 180.
Moreau, Gustave, 164.
Mort de Valmiki (*La*) 108, 124, 176–178.
Musique, La, 140.
Musset, 24, 26, 53, 56, 59, 63, 67, 88, 100, 105, 180, 184.

N

Napoleon, 33.
Napoleon III, 49, 128, 133.
Néfrou-Râ, 108.
New Life (*The*) 138.
Night, 116.
Niobé, 184.
Nox, 143–144.
Nuit de Mai, 67.
Nuits (*Les*) 105, 183, 184.
Nurmahal, 112–113.

O

Ode on a Grecian Urn, 155–156.
Odyssey (*The*) 68.
Oppresion and Poverty, 38.
Orientales (*Les*) 62.
Othello, 110.

P

Palmer, G. H., 83.
Panthère Noire (*La*) 151–153.
Pantouns Malais, 8, 74, 108–112.
Paradise, 87.
Paradox of the Actor (*The*) 68.
Parfum Impérissable (*Le*) 88–90.
Parny, Évariste de, 3.
Parny, Paul de, 3.
Pascal, 7, 128.
Passion (*The*) 158.
Pasteur, 60.
Pater, 55.
Perez Petit, X.
Petit Traité de la poésie française, 71, 75, 115.
Phalange, 37, 45.
Plaintes du Cyclope, 90, 105.
Plaintes d'un Icare, 57.
Plato, 19, 20, 21, 24, 35, 88.
Poe, 55.
Poem (*The*) 88.
Poèmes Barbares, 21.

Poèmes Tragiques, 8.
Poems of Antiquity, 135.
Ponsard, 47.
Prayer on the Acropolis, 65–66.
Pre-Raphaelites, 55.
Progrès de la poésie française, 22.
Prometheus, 119.
Prosas Profanas, 182.
Pythagoras, 35.

Q

Quaïn, 107, 108, 114–121, 183.

R

Rabelais, 4, 5.
Racine, IX, 63, 73, 179.
Ramayana (The) 96, 177, 178.
Ravine Saint-Gilles (La) 126–127.
Raynal (The Abbé) 32.
Régnier, Henri de, 180.
Rembrandt, 83.
Renan, 40, 41, 55, 60, 62, 65, 66, 108, 132.
Republican Catechism, 43.
Rêve du Jaguar (Le) 184.
Reveries of a Mystic Pagan, 63.
Revolution (The French) 37, 43, 67, 115.
Revolution (of 1848) 37, 40, 41, 43, 49, 50, 58.
Rimas, 106.
Riscourt, A. de, 3.
Riscourt de Lanux, 3.
Rodó, X, 182.
Roman de Renart, 148.
Romanticism, 1, 46, 47, 123, 145, 179, 180.
Romeo and Juliet, 102.
Roses d'Ispahan (Les) 74, 105–106.
Ronsard, 26, 63.
Rouffet, 6, 12, 22, 61.
Rousseau, 6, 23, 29, 31, 37, 56, 137.
Rubens, 173.
Ruskin, 55.

S

Sainte-Beuve, 48.
Saint-Jean, 14, 15.
Salammbô, 61.
Salome, 111.
Samain, Albert, 180.
Sanctis, de, 87, 181.
Sand, George, 35, 47, 49, 59, 67, 89, 105.
Scarlet Beast (The) 132–134.
Schelling, 47.
Sea (The) 28, 60.
Secret de la vie (Le) 169–170.
Sentiment Religieux chez Leconte de Lisle (Le) 24, 35.
Sept Cordes de la lyre (Les) 35, 59, 67.
Shakspere, X, 1, 68, 69.
Shaw, G. B. 4.
Shelley, 115.
Si l'Aurore, 176.
Simone et Silva, 100.
Social Psychology (McDougall's) 10.
Socrates, 37.
Soleils! Poussière d'Or . . . 170–171.
Sommeil du Condor (Le) 150–151, 184.
Source (La) 5.
Sources de Leconte de Lisle (Les) 96.

Souvenir, 24, 88, 89.
Souvenir d'Enfance et de jeunesse, 55, 62.
Souvenir et un Regret (*Un*) 23.
Spencer, Herbert, 64.
Spinoza, 169, 174, 183.
Spronck, 99, 101.
Stances (*Les*) 180.
Stephen, James, 152.
Stephenson, R. L., IX.
Stesichorus, 63.
Studies in Literature, 150.
Sully-Prudhomme, 59, 167.
Swift, 4.
Swinburne, 55, 182.
Symbolists, IX, 79, 145, 179, 180, 181.
Symonds, J. A., 55, 58, 59, 63.
Synge, IX.

T

Taine, 3, 48.
Theocritus, 182.
Thestylis, 90–91.
To a Wild Duck, 150.
Todd, H. A., XI.
Tragiques (*Les*) 133.
Tristesse, 15, 24.
Tristesse du Diable (*La*) 122–123.
Turgeniev, 42.
Turner, 83.

U

Ultra Cœlos, 124–126, 127.

V

Vase Brisé (*Le*) 167.
Variété (*La*) 34.
Venus of Milo, 173, 184.
Vérandah (*La*) 72, 74, 154–155.
Verhaeren, 180.
Verlaine, 28, 72, 106, 180, 181.
Vianey, 96.
Vida es sueño (*La*) 170.
Vigny, 8, 49, 59, 61, 134, 161, 176, 180, 184.
Virgin Soil, 42.
Vision de Brahma (*La*) 108, 159–167, 170.
Voltaire, 58, 131.

W

Wagner, 71.
Wanderers Nachtlied, 143–144.
Whitman, Walt, 83, 162.
Wilde, Oscar, 55, 79.
Wingèd Victory (*The*) 2.
Woodberry, George E., 10, 55, 68.
Wordsworth, 56, 70.

Z

Zola, 5.

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